Canadian Jack

JOHN MACKIE

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CANADIAN JACK

A LONG AND LOW LOGHOUSE WAS BURNING FIERCELY.

CANADIAN JACK

BY

JOHN MACKIE

AUTHOR OF
"THE HEART OF THE PRAIRIE" "HIDDEN IN CANADIAN WILDS"
"BLACK MAN'S ROCK" "IN SEARCH OF SMITH" "THE TREASURE
HUNTERS" "A BUSH MYSTERY" "THE RISING OF THE RED MAN"
ETC. ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY ARTHUR TWIDLE

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FOREWORDS

I HOPE that if Jack Irwin or Sergeant Pollock, late of the Royal North-West Mounted Police, or any of the other characters in this story with whose doings I have taken liberties, should happen to come across it and read it, they will forgive me for the sake of our good comradeship since the troublous times I write about. Of course, like most fiction-writers, when dealing with a series of real happenings I have had to shape some of them so that my main object should be achieved—the writing of a story. But as I lived for several years amid the scenes I have endeavoured to depict, and have revisited them two or three times since then, I think I can lay claim to having presented a fairly faithful picture of the staunch comrades and the life I once knew so well.

JOHN MACKIE,
Late of the Royal N.-W. Mounted Police.

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CANADIAN JACK

CHAPTER I

CANADIAN BORN

WHY John Irwin was usually known as Canadian Jack in Manitoba and out West, where the great bulk of the settlers were, at that time, Canadians born and bred, was surely something that savoured of the trite and the unnecessary. Most of them indeed had come from Ontario, where their fathers and grandfathers before them had hewn, burnt, and made fertile farms and orchards out of virgin forest. How could Jack, whose great-great-grandfather had come out to Canada with Wolfe; whose son—Jack's great-grandfather --had grown corn on the site of the Place Viger Hotel in Montreal; whose grandfather later still had been one of Wolseley's volunteers when that hard-working soldier made his memorable trip overland to the Red

River in order to square accounts with Louis Riel;—how, I ask, could Jack have been other than Canadian Jack to distinguish him from the thousands of others, who, although perhaps Canadian so far as one generation or even two went, were yet not like Jack—a Canuck to the back-bone in speech, thought, and that instinctive love, amounting indeed to a quite understandable passion, for pine-clad hillside, swiftly rushing river, and wide, far-stretching prairie? It is indeed all very well for lovers of wild nature to write and talk about such picturesque things, but to understand all they mean one must have the spell of them in the blood. One must be able instinctively to recognise that faint aroma—the reek of the kinakinink—the willow bark—that hangs round the buckskin that has been cured in the smoke of the teepee. One must have that, at times, irresistible longing to launch one's bark canoe on the pine-fringed river or lake and to keep on paddling indefinitely, or to shoulder a gun and disappear into the beckoning depths of the forest. And this love of the Primeval Wilderness can only come to a man through fore-folk who have done and loved the doing of such things. It is born in one, and will come out some time or another, even

although the thin veneer of civilisation makes it look impossible. For instance, from what does the love of sport and hunting which characterises the average Briton spring but the one-time necessity of the individual to feed and clothe himself by the spoils of the chase long before the days when he had learned to delve and spin, and the plethora of game had disappeared before a growing and hungry human race? Instincts die hard, if indeed they ever wholly die. Who, for instance, cares to spill salt wantonly, and why does the domestic dog turn round two or three times before lying down?

Jack's father had settled in the Pembina Valley just after the first rebellion in '70, and one of Jack's first recollections was being taken on a wiry cayuse, or prairie-bred horse, on a great buffalo hunt into the Sourisford country that lay to the west. They had camped on the spot where the little town of Melita now stands, and next day they had fallen in with the buffalo.

What a nondescript company that was that hunted them! There were picturesque old settlers and trappers with home-made head-gear of beaver and skunk and the more familiar broad-brimmed felt. They wore heavy

chaperegos or leggings of undressed skins, and their great rowelled spurs of Spanish and Mexican origin were of the type that the riders of the great prairies and pampas still affect. Many of them wore their hair long, and all were armed to the teeth. They spoke a quaint patois composed of various foreign tongues. Some of them had white skins, some yellow, some were full-blooded Indians, either Assiniboine, Cree, or Sioux, and it would have puzzled a student of the different races of mankind to have determined to what branch of the human family some of them belonged. But they were all buffalo hunters, and a picturesque looking lot withal, so what else mattered ?

And then the sight of that seemingly limitless ocean of prairie that one could hardly see for the shaggy black bodies of the buffalo that covered it. Not hundreds of buffalo, or even thousands, but literally tens of thousands and hundreds of thousands. One could indeed only see a far-stretching billowy expanse of shaggy black manes and bobbing horns as the immense herd, scenting its natural enemy, Man, made off while the very earth shook with the thunder of myriad hoofs. And then the crescent-shaped and broken line of the skilled but reckless riders, as they gave their

eager horses a loose rein and hung on to the rear and flanks of the swiftly moving masses of fleeing bison. No wonder that men learned to shoot in those days, riding as they did right into the herd itself and singling out the finest of those glorious creatures. But not always was it that the hunter came off best. Perhaps infuriated bulls would charge from both sides at once, and before the incautious rider could bring down one of them and escape over its body, the other, with lowered head and a tremulous bellow of rage, would be on to him and bring both man and horse to earth, perhaps never to rise again. "Here's How!" "Here's a Ho!"—the old-time toast of the buffalo hunter, which literally means "Here's a horn!" still lingers in the West, though many doubtless use it who do not realise its meaning.

It was in the lovely Pembina Valley, and, to be more specific, some fifteen or twenty miles to the north of Cartwright in Southern Manitoba, that Jack was born. And what an ideal place it was in which to live! There was the flat-bottomed valley with its wooded sides and clumps of saskatoon bushes, and which at one time had doubtless been the bed of a great river—just as the Valley of Qu'-Appelle had also been, and through which the

knee-deep creek meandered a feeble apology for its one-time great sire, the rich meadows where the grass grew girth high, and one had only to scratch the soil and throw in the seed to see prodigious crops fairly spring up before one's eyes. But there were dams or lakes in that long, wandering valley which frequently that most competent civil engineer, the beaver, had constructed for its own well-being and delectation, lakes that teemed with fish, and the wooded shores of which were haunted by many kinds of deer. And, of course, there were bears whose mission in life seemed to be to upset the deer, and take an unwarranted interest in things outside their own business. Indeed those bears occasionally gave Jack's father and mother considerable concern by allowing their inquisitiveness to get the upper hand of them. On these occasions they would emerge from some neighbouring thicket and stroll over to the farm buildings when perhaps Jack's father was away making hay in some neighbouring slough—marshy spot growing excellent grass—and his mother was busy with the never-ending chores—the usual domestic duties pertaining to a settler's home.

Jack was not more than fourteen years of

age when the most noteworthy of these visits from the prowling marauders occurred. It was an adventure that was to stand out in his memory when equally perilous ones had almost been forgotten. It was indicative of that resource and prompt action which was to characterise him later on, so one need not apologise for setting it down here.

It was a hot day in early spring, and the late thaw was causing the earth to steam and nature to break out visibly in tender green. The season, indeed, seemed in a hurry to make up for lost time, and the twitter of birds and the hum of insect life were eloquent of the awakening in progress. Two of Jack's younger brothers and his little sister were playing on a grassy spot a little to the right of the long, low, slab-built dwelling-house, and he himself was watching them from the doorway, when suddenly to his horror he caught sight of a couple of black bears slouching from a clump of saskatoon bushes, then walk warily towards the unsuspecting little ones. It was all so sudden and horrible that for the moment Jack appeared to be in the throes of some particularly vivid and poignant nightmare. He tried to cry out to those dear little ones, but he had lost his voice. His feet were glued to the earth.

But it was only for a minute, it might not even have been that—for thought is the swiftest thing on earth—for, in less time than it takes to tell it, he remembered the spare snider rifle his father kept handy in the cupboard with the bag of ball-cartridges alongside!

To rush indoors and seize and load the rifle was the work of a minute or so. When he rushed outside again the bears were standing with their heads turned away from him, but facing the children. The latter, on seeing the great shaggy creatures they had doubtless been cautioned against, so as to check any desire they might have for straying into the woods, promptly ran together and clung to one another, as one may see children do in time of either real or imaginary danger. With fearful, wide-open eyes they gazed at the two bears; their little mouths were open, but they could not even articulate a cry for help. Perhaps the bears could not exactly make the young humans out, or perhaps they were only wondering which of them would be best to take; but, in any case, it was a lucky thing for Jack's young brothers and sister that these bears did pause, for in that brief space Jack seized his opportunity.

There was a pile of cord-wood—firewood as

the English people call it—near at hand, and that gave Jack his necessary cover. The wonder was that the really clever bears did not hear and turn their attention to him sooner than they did. As it was, one of them, with lowered head, was just preparing to make a rush in upon the children, when Jack put the rifle to his shoulder and pulled the trigger.

The bullet must have glanced off the sloping skull somewhere between the ears, for the great brute dropped on its knees as if it had suddenly lost all control over its limbs, and doubtless it had for the moment been paralysed. But a bear is about the hardest thing in wild nature to kill or disable, and in another minute it was up again, and this time its attentions were turned to Jack. But the lad had already jerked out the disused cartridge and slipped in a fresh one.

Just at that moment it seemed to the boy that the situation took on still more the form of a horrible nightmare. Jack saw his mother come rushing from an outhouse and making towards the children. The bears were directly between her and them. To distract the attention of the doubtless hungry brutes to himself was obviously the only way out of the dilemma, and Jack lost no time in doing it.

He fired point-blank at one, the nearest bear, that seemed about to rush at his mother. It dropped with a bullet in its shoulder, and wriggled about on the ground, biting and snapping as if at an imaginary enemy. The boy had no time to reload. Picking up a handy billet of hard-wood, some ten or fifteen pounds in weight, he advanced on bear number two, which promptly started to meet him.

That bear must have seen more stars than ever it had noted in the firmament, for the oak billet struck it fair on the forehead. The brute's head being lowered, the skull just then offered a splendid target. It was a blow that ought to have killed anything else in Nature save a bear. For the moment it stood with outstretched legs looking decidedly sick and tottery, then it recovered itself and made a dash at Jack.

This was exactly what the boy wanted. He shouted to his mother to take the children into the house, and then he started on the liveliest ten minutes he had ever experienced in his life, not even taking into account that memorable buffalo hunt.

Jack was fleet of foot in a way that town-bred boys can hardly hope to understand. He had been chasing various kinds of wild animals

all his life, and the active and healthy outdoor exercise had developed his lungs and muscles to a degree that would certainly have aroused the wonder and envy of other boys not brought up under similar conditions.

Jack started to run round the high and irregular wood-pile, something far from easy to any one unacquainted with its peculiar construction. But he knew its peculiarities well, for he had helped to cut and stack it. Moreover, one could not run uninterruptedly round it, for in point of fact it was composed of two or three irregular piles, one of which contained a cul-de-sac, and it was into this that Jack conceived the brilliant idea of leading the bear. Of course he took good care not to go into it himself just then ; he only pretended to do so, and passed out of sight round the entrance to it.

Only that Jack was an adept at jumping and dodging, and knew every foot of the ground, that bear would most assuredly have succeeded in catching him. As it was, it very nearly did, and more than once. The awkward part of the whole situation was that the boy realised the necessity of sticking to his rifle, but, of course, he could not spare a moment to reload. That would have been the bear's opportunity.

Round and round and in and out of that puzzle of a pile went Jack, and only that the bear lost time when the boy took an unexpected turn the end would have come quickly. Jack, of course, knew better than to get into the cul-de-sac, and though he tried again and again to make his pursuer believe he had turned in there, Bruin was not to be fooled. It indeed takes a remarkably clever man to fool a bear, which is perhaps one of the most knowing creatures under the sun.

In the meantime Jack's mother had managed to get the frightened children into the house, and, this effected, she promptly turned her attention to her first-born, who by this time was conscious of the fact that his pursuer, by its persistent and relentless tactics, must soon play him out. At one time he had half a mind to throw his rifle away and try to climb the stack of logs, but he knew he would not be quick enough for the enemy. His breath came quickly in short agonised gasps. He felt the end was close at hand. Unless something happened the bear would have him.

It was the sight of his mother running quickly towards them with a tomahawk in one hand that spurred the hard-pressed boy to supreme effort.

THE BEAR STRUCK AT HIM WITH A GIANT PAW.

"Keep back, mother—keep back!" he managed to shout, and, in order to distract the attention of the bear, he turned boldly into the cul-de-sac. It was, indeed, a brave thing for the boy to do; but then the life of his mother was at stake.

He threw his rifle on to the pile and made a spring for a projecting log. His hands closed fairly round it, and in another moment he had swung himself on to it. Without pause he rose to his feet and took another leap. This time he managed to scramble to the top, and not an instant too soon. The bear had shot past the mouth of the cul-de-sac, but had quickly corrected its error and followed the lad in. When it had raised itself on its hind-legs, and struck at him with a giant paw like an experienced boxer, the blow just grazed a disappearing boot.

"Go back, mother! Go back; I'm all right now!" Jack managed to cry.

The Western mother looked and knew that what her son said was indeed the case. Still reluctantly she withdrew. There were the little ones in the house to see to, and, doubtless, she knew from what she had seen and heard of bears, that in the meantime, at least,

her boy could be trusted to keep himself out of harm's way.

"Now," exclaimed Jack, as he looked down upon his enemy whose ugly snout, as it stood erect, just reached to the level of the boy's feet, "I'm going to teach you manners, Mr. Bear. You made me get a bigger rustle on than was good for my general health, so now I'm going to get even with you."

But first Jack picked up the rifle, and saw to it that there was a good ball-cartridge in the breech. This done, he laid it on one side, where it would be handy in the event of unforeseen developments. Then he looked around for a serviceable sapling. He speedily found one. It was a stout, well-seasoned stick some six feet in length, which, when wielded with both hands, was really a very formidable weapon. He approached to the edge of the pile and had a good look at the enemy. Bruin gazed up at him with wicked, twinkling eyes. With that almost human cunning which the bear possesses to a very marked degree, it drew back and seemed to shrink in size. It looked around undecidedly and half-heartedly, as if realising there was nothing more to be done. This was to induce Jack to come a little nearer. But the boy had heard of such

clever tricks, and was not to be drawn within reach of those swift, terrible claws.

"You've been looking for trouble pretty badly," he said, addressing it. "Guess I'll just give you some to go on with."

It was exactly at the same moment that Bruin made his meditated spring upwards, and tried to gain a footing on the pile, that Jack raised his stout stave with both hands over his head, and put his whole heart into the business in hand. Within the next minute or two it appeared as if the bear were going to prevail by reason of his purposeful endeavour, for more than head and shoulders succeeded in reaching above the level, and he made frantic efforts to throw himself on top. He would doubtless have succeeded in scrambling up but for one disconcerting factor—Jack's stick. Down came the business end of it with all the force that the well-grown lad's arms could exert, and from snout to sloping forehead there was a concussion that must have savoured of the end of all things.

Crash! One such blow was enough. The powerful limbs twitched violently as if a shock from an electric battery had been applied to them; the grip of the steel-like claws momentarily relaxed. Bruin fell backwards limply

and all of a heap. What a magnificently thick skull the brute must have possessed, and on what strictly scientific lines Mother Nature must have fashioned it in order to resist an onslaught such as that. But Bruin rose to his legs again with surprising promptitude, and made another attempt to scale the wood-pile. Jack was quite ready for him, and whacked him soundly over head and ears. It was more than Bruin had bargained for.

It was the sickest looking specimen of a bear imaginable that gazed up at Jack. There was quite an injured expression on Bruin's face, which seemed to imply much disgust and indignation at the employment of tactics outside the rules of the game—Bruin's particular game, of course.

"You don't mean to say you're goin' to take that lying down?" cried Jack. "You're a mighty poor sort of bear anyhow! Come on and let's have another set to."

Now that Jack was on top of the wood-pile, with a good stout stick in his hands and a loaded rifle lying hard by, he felt very brave indeed. He seemed to have already quite forgotten the fact that only a very few minutes before he had been tearing round that cord-wood, drawing his breath in agonised gasps, with

Death in the shape of an angry bear very close to his heels indeed. The end of all things had seemed very near to him then. But that is the way with most humans, and perhaps after all it is just as well that it is so.

Bruin retired a few paces as if to study the strategical features of the situation, and Jack was about to pick up the rifle in case it might meditate flight, when he noticed that its companion, which he had previously wounded, had risen shakily to its feet and was about to make off towards the thicket again. This could not be allowed. Jack picked up the rifle, took careful aim, and fired. The bear dropped like a stone. Jack had shot it right through the head.

One would have thought that the sight of what had happened should have struck fear into the heart of bear number two, but such was not the case. Almost before the boy could jerk out the disused cartridge, slip in a fresh one, and secure the breech-block, the cunning and infuriated brute had made a bold dash for him. With a discernment that spoke volumes for its sagacity, it jumped on to a large wooden block, hitherto overlooked, alongside the wood-pile, and from there it sprang on to the platform on which Jack stood. It

had no intention of being beaten off by a stick this time. It was do or die. The situation was desperate.

Jack had no time to regret that he had not shot the bear when he had a chance. The time had passed for thinking. Bruin had gained the rough platform, and was in the act of rushing on him when the lad put the rifle to his shoulder. He knew very well, young as he was, that one might put a dozen bullets into a bear without killing it, unless one managed to penetrate to a vital spot. Quick as thought Jack aimed right between the eyes. Being so close to Bruin he could hardly miss. Bang! and the bullet crashed home. The bear fell dead where it stood, and at the same moment Jack lost his balance on the awkward platform and fell backwards from his point of vantage. It was rather unfortunate that he should have made such an ungraceful descent just in his moment of victory, but he had every reason to be thankful that he had not broken his neck. He had not even hurt himself particularly. But he had triumphed over the bears, and, what was of infinitely greater importance, he had undoubtedly saved his younger brothers and sister from being carried away by them.

It was a proud moment for Jack when he surveyed the carcasses of the two great creatures he had shot, and his mother became more demonstrative than Jack deemed consistent with his dignity as a shooter of bears. It was not only one bear he had shot, but two. And they were not the placid-tempered bears one meets with in the Fall of the year, when the absorption of much game and wild fruit has obviated the necessity of an attack upon everything they come across. They were bears that had awakened from their long winter's sleep with ravenous appetites, and were prepared to take big risks in the satisfying of the same.

"But it was a mistake, mother, not to shoot that big fellow right away when I had the chance," admitted Jack thoughtfully. "They won't stand much foolin' 'round, will bears, and I guess they know how to get a rustle on."

CHAPTER II

REBELLION

The Pembina Valley in Southern Manitoba, like the Qu'Appelle and other western valleys, is and always has been very beautiful and delightful. About the time of which I write—only a matter of a score or so of years ago—the settlers were comparatively few on its picturesque wooded banks and rich alluvial flats. Here and there were little colonies of Half-Breeds with occasional renegade Indians living amongst them, and a happy-go-lucky, unprogressive and irresponsible lot they were. Amongst those nondescripts perhaps those of British origin were of most importance. They adapted themselves to their surroundings and conditions most readily. Those of French extraction were the easiest going, and seemingly the least inclined to take things seriously and improve their positions. Still they were a warm-hearted and entertaining lot, and pulled

well with their neighbours, save when they came temporarily under the influence of the malcontent, Louis Riel. In those days there were lots of game and good prices going for furs and pelts, so why should they trouble about that far-off but at the same time inevitable future when the buffalo and deer would practically disappear, and every block of land would be taken up and occupied by far-seeing people from down East, from across the lines, and even from that far-away Old Country itself?

There was no doubt that those early settlers had the very pick of the land, and very fine sites indeed some of those log and sod-roofed dwellings occupied. An Englishman coming to the country could quite imagine some many-gabled mansion peeping from those wooded knolls on the slope of a valley, where stretched out beneath it a crystal lake suggested finny sport. The sides of the buttes[1] and coulées[2] were eloquent of caribou, blacktail deer, antelope, and bear, not to mention innumerable prairie-chicken, quails, and pigeons, and other kinds of game. It was an ideal land, and if the winters were long and cold at times, and blizzards blew their worst some-

[1] Hills. [2] Valleys.

times for two or three days at a stretch, it was a *dry* cold, which is a very different thing indeed from the *damp* cold of the Old Country, and certainly not half so unpleasant.

The neighbourhood that Jack's parents had settled in possessed good arable land which was unequalled for wheat-growing, not to mention rich pastures in the valley itself, now contained quite a fair number of inhabitants if older communities perhaps would have described it as sparsely settled. Already the settlers had begun to exercise a system of district administration, not to speak of having a member to represent them in Parliament.

It was Jack's father and mother, both fairly well-educated people, who had agitated, and been the means of having a schoolhouse built in the neighbourhood, and to this the children came for miles around. Some came on foot, and some on ponies, while in the winter the little sleigh or cutter on runners brought them well protected from the cold by the splendid buffalo robes, in those days common enough and in general use. The possessor of a buffalo robe to-day is quite entitled to give himself or herself airs.

Perhaps Jack was no cleverer or more perverse and careless than the generality of boys. He, however, realised that his parents having a fairly large family to provide for and educate, could not afford to keep him at school longer than was absolutely necessary in order to get a fairly sound, if plain, education. He knew it would be very foolish of him not to make the most of his time. To do Jack justice, he did so. Still he never was so fond of his lessons that he was not glad when the time came round for the various holidays. Various, because they were always chosen with due regard to the demand for juvenile labour at certain busy times of the year. For instance, the principal holidays always occurred when the children were required on the harvest field. The fruit gathering or berrying season was undoubtedly the most popular function, for on such occasions the children, as well as their elders, made up large parties, which, indeed, were veritable picnics on those wooded hillsides, where raspberries, blueberries, and saskatoons grew in richest profusion. Then there was seeding-time, and threshing-time, and herding-time, when to keep a boy at school was considered either wanton extravagance and ostentation, or a sign of quite unusual prosperity.

Upon the whole, the young people did not want for change, and Jack and his brothers and sisters were no exception to the normal state of affairs. But perhaps Jack did not suffer from the various duty calls in a scholastic sense quite so much as some of the other boys and girls, for his parents took good care to supplement and overlook his studies at home. Moreover, as the young people, doubtless in order to make up for the somewhat irregular conditions already mentioned, were kept at school in country districts longer than in towns, such breaks were more than made up for. Indeed the practicality, self-reliance, and general usefulness that is inculcated in both boys and girls in Canadian country districts is likely to be of much greater use and credit to them in after life than many of the questionable and tawdry so-called accomplishments which the children are tricked out with elsewhere.

A few years had passed since Jack had distinguished himself by shooting the bears, and great changes had come about in the country. A great transcontinental railway—the Canadian Pacific—had been projected and now ran from one end of Manitoba to the other. Winnipeg, formerly Fort Garry, had grown

from a Hudson Bay Post and a few log-houses into quite a respectable little town, and numerous other places that previously had not existed or only been names with little stores or trading posts attached, now figured on the latest maps. The buffalo had almost disappeared, although still there were any amount of deer and bears in the great valleys or in such places as Moose Mountain, Turtle Mountain, or the Cypress Hills farther to the West. The great transcontinental line which had been begun at opposite sides of the continent had certainly not yet met, but still the converting of the one time "Great American Desert," as it had been styled upon the maps, and "The Great Lone Land" in comparatively recent years, began to attract settlers and to enter on that upward movement, slow perhaps at first, that at the present day bids fair to break all records of progress. But about the middle of the eighties it was to receive a check. Jack was then just eighteen. He had never been more than a week or two away from home at a time, and he was wondering if it would be possible to get some work at one of the construction camps on the railway, just by way of a break and gaining fresh experience and some money at the

same time, when the opportunity to do so came.

A couple of North-West Mounted Policemen —now the Royal North-West—had ridden up to the homestead late in the afternoon one day in early spring and asked to be put up for the night. As the members of that familiar and respected force, apart from the fact that they always insisted on paying their way with a liberal hand, were always welcomed for their own sakes as well as for the always fair and just law they represented, they were at once taken possession of by Jack and his younger brothers—indeed one might almost say by the entire family—and warmly welcomed. That Sergeant Pollock had something of grave importance to communicate to Mr. Irwin was obvious from the first. Perhaps not even the youngest member of the party who sat down to the evening meal that was soon on the table after the arrival of the sergeant and the trooper but had a good guess as to what was in the wind, for it had been common knowledge for weeks that the Half-Breeds—the *Metis* as they were officially called—and the Indians were meditating revolt, and it was only a question of time before there would be serious happenings in the land. It was, however,

not until the meal was over and Jack and his father and the two Mounted Policemen had gone out ostensibly to have a look at the horses in the stable that the subject was broached.

"Mr. Irwin," said Sergeant Pollock, "you're a Justice of the Peace, and, of course, know pretty well what has been going on in the country lately, so I suppose you've some idea as to what has brought me here to-night. Anyhow, to come straight to the point, I've come to warn you regarding some of your neighbours—the Half-Breeds, of course, I mean—and to get from you such personal assistance as you can reasonably give."

"Have the Half-Breeds actually risen?" asked Mr. Irwin anxiously.

"Yes," was the reply, "and I don't want to alarm your womenfolk needlessly, but I may as well tell you that there has been within the last few days more than one pretty bad massacre, particularly in the Saskatchewan district, and I'm afraid the trouble is spreading. The Breeds have been cutting the telegraph wires, and that's doubtless why you haven't heard of the matter before."

"But how in the name of all that is wonderful has the trouble been allowed to go so

far ? " inquired the farmer with a grave face. " Surely the North-West Mounted Police that is practically in charge of the country could be trusted to act on its own initiative and nip in the bud any incipient rebellion ? "

" That is just what it could and would have done had it only been allowed to act," replied Sergeant Pollock. " But the Mounted Police, you must remember, are only some five or six hundred strong, and are scattered over a country a good many times bigger than Europe. But it is the old story, they have been hampered in their actions by well-meaning people down East, as usual ignorant of the grave conditions existing here. Doubtless the French element, to which the rebels belong, have had most ado with that. Though the Colonel and Commissioner of the Mounted Police has sent urgent messages to Ottawa to allow him to deal with the situation, the powers there have disregarded his representations and pooh-poohed what he has told them. The result is that the most the Mounted Police can do now is to get as many recruits together as possible and help save the settlers in these parts where the trouble is most acute, until the troops can be hurried up."

" Is it as bad as that ? " asked Mr. Irwin

uneasily. "Of course we're a few hundred miles here from the Saskatchewan River, and there's no means of getting news save what comes through by a chance rider. I suppose Riel is leading them?"

"Yes, I dare say you heard of that big meeting he held near Battleford and how he told them the time was ripe to rise. Well, they have risen, only their headquarters isn't Fort Garry, or Winnipeg, as it was twelve or fifteen years ago, but Battleford, Prince Albert, and Edmonton, and right along the Saskatchewan River, and it will take an army, and a fairly big one at that, to put them down now. The settlers have gone into laager at certain points. The wonder is you haven't been interfered with here."

"There are hardly enough of them, and the whites are fairly numerous, you see. By the way, I reported the fact to your people that Gabriel Dumont—General Dumont as he calls himself—passed through this way several months ago. He fled the country, you remember, when Wolseley arrived at Fort Garry in the last rebellion. How is it they allowed him to come back again?"

"You can well ask," exclaimed Sergeant Pollock bitterly. "We reported his presence

at once to headquarters at Ottawa, but they had almost forgotten all about the Red River Rebellion there. The old ladies and the people who had grown rich because real estate would increase in value said that if poor Louis Riel and Gabriel Dumont did choose to come back and have a look at the land of their adoption, it would be a pity to interfere with them. What they would not remember was that Riel and Dumont were rebels and murderers, and that by allowing them to return they were giving them a chance of once more starting a fresh rebellion. Only now the trouble will be of an infinitely more widespread and serious nature. The mistake the Police made was in not effectually squashing Riel and Dumont when they again showed their noses in the country, and reporting the matter afterwards—if they thought it worth while."

"I don't think the Half-Breeds will give you much trouble here," observed Mr. Irwin. "They've really got more land than they can make use of, and that without paying rent as their neighbours have to do. We have treated them more than fairly, and lived on the best of terms with them, so I don't see why they should want to molest us. In fact, if they

wanted to do us any harm they could easily have done so before now."

"Well, that is satisfactory, and I hope you'll go and have a talk with those of them you can trust, and try and get them to use their influence with the others to remain neutral. They are not farming the land they have squatted on, so have not received title-deeds for it; so, if it comes to a point of law, they are only retaining their holdings on sufferance."

"You can count on me to explain things to them, Sergeant Pollock," said the settler. "But I don't think that it is the comparatively few Breeds in Southern Manitoba one need worry about. You see we have the railway now only a hundred miles or so to the north of us. It is the big Breed settlements in the neighbourhood of the Saskatchewan River away from the railway where the trouble is to be apprehended, and where, as you say, the trouble now is. What are the people in Lower Canada doing in the matter? And Winnipeg is only a couple of hundred miles or so from here—the Government should be able to enlist quite a considerable force there."

"They are doing so at the present moment,"

was the reply. "But you must remember it takes some little time to get an irregular force together, not to mention equipping it, and seeing to its commissariat department and transport. When once the latter leaves the line of railway, you know, it has to rely solely upon itself for supplies. You can be certain that there is more than one train-load of men and horses and munitions of war on its way up from down East to Regina at the present moment. And it isn't as if the winter was exactly over. We'll have one or two or three cold snaps yet, you'll see, and the difficulty will be getting our transport to the front. But it wasn't merely to tell you all this that I came here. Can't you guess what brought me, Jack?"

"You want recruits for the front," said Jack, "and I know that my father will let me go."

"You're right about me wanting recruits," said Sergeant Pollock. "But of course your parents must have a say in the matter. "That's why I've spoken before your father."

In a moment it was as if his entire outlook upon life had been changed. It was now open to him to break away from the colourless and sometimes undoubtedly monotonous existence

he had been leading. He had felt it was not much of a life for a young fellow with anything in him. To go and shoulder a rifle alongside regular soldiers and take part in a real campaign was an adventure hitherto undreamt of. His was a happy home, still he realised that things could not continue as they were for ever. His younger brothers and sisters were growing up, and it would be better for himself and all of them if he went out into the world and made room for the others. In the past it had seemed as if the chance of broaching such a revolutionary change was withheld from him, but now here was a good opportunity—a quite exceptionally good one, seeing it carried with it considerable prospect of taking part in great and exciting doings, which in itself would be a distinction. Then there was the patriotic side of the question; but he would not dwell upon that. He needed no reminding that it was the duty of every able-bodied man and boy to fight for his country when necessity demanded; he was only too glad to be confronted with the opportunity of engaging in a campaign.

"Are you really keen to go, Jack, and do you think you realise what a serious affair this rising may prove?" asked Mr. Irwin soberly.

"It can be no harder for me than for any of the others," replied Jack. "Am I big enough and old enough to take on, Sergeant Pollock?"

"You are certainly quite big and strong enough, and no one would question your age, even although it was a few weeks or months short of the regulation requirements," replied the Mounted Policeman. "There are scores of young fellows like yourself joining all over the country. If you say you are ready to volunteer, I'll take you on with some others to Brandon, where you can travel on the Canadian Pacific Railway to Regina, and from which place you'll be sent on to where you may be required. You'd better make up your mind to-night, for I'll be leaving first thing to-morrow morning. If you've got a good horse and saddle I'd advise you to take them with you, and the Government will allow you liberally for them."

"Father, you'll let me go, won't you?" pleaded Jack. "And you'll make it right with mother?"

"So far as I am concerned," said Mr. Irwin, "I quite think it is right that you should go. It is the duty of every citizen to defend his country. I'm only sorry I

can't go myself. I'll have to stay behind and look after your mother and your brothers and sisters. I certainly can't leave them unprotected."

"You'll do more than your share, Mr. Irwin, if you'll simply keep your eye on the Half-Breeds in your neighbourhood and see that they're not drawn into the rising," observed Sergeant Pollock.

"Well, Jack, if you're going with the Sergeant to-morrow morning I'd better go and make it right with your mother," said Mr. Irwin. "Let's only hope that the news of the rising and those massacres have been exaggerated, and that Riel and Dumont and his gang when they hear of the troops coming up will think better of it and clear out of the country as fast as their legs will carry them. Don't come over to the house for a few minutes or so, Jack."

CHAPTER III

OFF TO THE NORTH-WEST

PERHAPS it was as well for Jack and all concerned that, once having made up his mind to go and fight the rebels, he should do so without further ado.

To have delayed would have been to prolong the very natural bitterness of leave-taking. It was the first break in the family life, and there is no need to dwell upon that. To get together Jack's simple outfit was no difficult matter. Next morning he set out with Sergeant Pollock, who was to pick up a party of recruits some twenty miles or so to the north at midday. Mr. Irwin himself, with Jack's kit in the cutter,[1] drove with them to that point. Jack rode alongside him, but it was a comparatively silent drive. Doubtless each understood what was in the other's heart, so there was no need for words. They had

[1] A species of sleigh.

not proceeded more than a couple of miles when a joyous bark behind them caused them to look round. In another minute a wiry-haired, nondescript dog that seemed half greyhound, half collie, and with a piece of rope dangling from its collar, dashed up. It cut a caper or two as if to express its satisfaction at having overcome difficulties and being with them again, and then trotted on ahead of the buggy in quite a taken-for-granted sort of way.

"Piper!" exclaimed Jack, with a show of displeasure, but at the same time not looking exactly displeased. "What are we going to do with him, father? I tied him up securely enough so that he shouldn't follow, but, as you see, he has chewed through the rope."

"Well, Jack, he evidently doesn't intend you to go without him," said Mr. Irwin, smiling. "We can't go back with him now. I reckon we'll have to take him along with us."

And that was how Jack's dog Piper came to be with his master throughout the North-West Rebellion. Jack had reared him as a pup, and the two had never been separated, and though the master had reluctantly made up his mind that of course a dog would be

entirely out of place with soldiers on a campaign, if indeed it would be allowable or practicable to fetch it along at all, Piper never for one moment realised any such disqualifications. He settled matters in his own way.

"Sergeant Pollock!" said Jack, as that cheery soldier came alongside. "Here is my dog Piper broken loose and come after me. We'll have to take him on with us in the meantime, I fear, but my father can take him back."

"You and Piper can settle that between you later on," observed the Mounted Policeman, smiling, and showing a good set of teeth. "I don't believe there is a body of soldiers or Police in Canada where they haven't got a dog or two. Quite a few of our fellows keep dogs which are company in a way while on lonely rides. The officers pretend not to see them as long as they don't advertise themselves too much. So if you care to take chances on him, fetch him along."

And that was how Piper came to accompany his master on his adventures.

A few hours later they met the other recruits, and Jack and his father said good-bye to each other. Mr. Irwin returned to his family and his farm with a heavy heart; but

he was not the only father in Canada who parted with his son that same day. The pioneers of our Dominions across the seas have had to face many such sacrifices, and never have they hesitated to make them in order that the flag of Great Britain should be kept flying. Let the folks who sit peaceably at home not forget that fact in their relations with their own flesh and blood across the waters in their time of stress and trouble. Let them not criticise, but believe in the safe truth that it is those on the spot who are best able to judge of the right or the wrong of local happenings.

It cheered Jack considerably to find some other young fellows he knew amongst the volunteers for the front. They were of all ages, and some had even been prisoners of Riel's in the first rebellion. As they themselves declared, they had only escaped shooting on that occasion because certain Indians or Breeds whom they had previously befriended had contrived to circumvent the orders of their vindictive and merciless leaders.

Jack now heard many things about the present rising concerning which he had hitherto only possessed imperfect knowledge. It was a little red-haired Irishman called Terence

O'Donohue who that night, when the party pulled into camp, and the individual members spread their blankets in the foot-deep hay in the great barn, told Jack a good deal about the why and wherefore of this second rebellion, which was actually engineered and was being conducted by the same man, Louis Riel, who had started the first one. Of course Jack had heard a good deal about the first rebellion, but there were some things that puzzled him about this second one. He asked the voluble and kindly Terence what it was exactly the Half-Breeds and those Indians who had risen in revolt really wanted.

" Sure and it's the whole country they want for their own blessed selves ! " declared Terence. " You see, they're too lazy to farm the land they have settled on—besides being more hunters than farmers by nature—so when the Government says that if they don't do it others will, they declare that the country is theirs to do as they like with, and so they sets up a Government of their own. What's more, they've openly declared war against Britain ! That would be funny if it didn't mean sorrow for so many."

" I suppose it was Louis Riel who put that into their heads ? " observed Jack.

"He and his kind, shure!" said Terence, with contempt.

"But I thought he was born down in Quebec, and was intended for the priesthood. How is it he is worrying about his distant relations up here?"

"An' did you never hear of the crathur they're afther callin' a parasite? Thirteen times out av the dozen ye'll be finding it's thim shpalpeens that can talk the leg off an iron pot that niver will work as long as they can git fools to listen to them. Louis Riel is little better than a perfessional agitator, though I'm not sayin', mind, he's not a bit of a fanatic, and has a bee in his bonnet as well. The pore feller tried for the Church, but he couldn't git into it, so he set up as a sort of high-priest on his own account. You see, he has ambition widout ability."

"He seems to have had ability enough to influence the thousands of Half-Breeds scattered all over the Saskatchewan, not to mention hundreds of Indians," observed Jack.

"Yes," said Terence, slowly and thoughtfully, "and he knew enough to make use of that played-out thrick of the adventurer to interduce the eclipse of the sun as a sign of approval from the Almighty, when any man

who owned an almanac might have knowed as much widout requiring to be told. You see, the Breeds and Injins don't go a red cent on book-larnin'."

"And, I suppose, Riel said he was the one man chosen by the Almighty to tell them what to do, and to lead them?"

"He did, sure, and there are any number of the Cree and Assiniboine Injuns who believe him, and are on the warpath now. If once the Blackfoots rise, it's a clane sweep av the counthry I'm thinkin' they'll make. But old Crow-foot, who is head of them, is a level-headed and wise ruler, and what wid Father Lacombe, who can be reckoned on to tell them the truth about things, I guess they'll sit tight and refuse to take a hand in the rising. But all the same, if it's true that Riel and his lot have seized Prince Albert and Battleford, it's a pretty tough job that General Middleton, Irvine, Herchmer, and Colonel Otter will have to quieten them again."

"But why is it the North-West Mounted Police allowed things to go so far?" asked Jack. "They must have seen how things were shaping for quite a long time."

"Of course they did; but you see they were hampered by red tape from down East. They

pointed out how things were going long ago, but they were told not to interfere. So now, what a troop of Mounted Police could have done in a day or two, if only they'd been allowed to do it, it will take an army and cost the counthry scores of lives, not to mention millions of dollars, before things are put straight."

"Then the Government at Ottawa are sending up lots of troops, and are determined to crush the rising?"

"The Canadian Government can always be relied upon to do a thing thoroughly when once it has made up its mind to see a thing through," said Terence decisively. "It's dhivil a bit oncertain ye need be as to what will be the end of this business, only it's many a pore lad will lose the number av his mess before that comes about, and I'm fearin' for the lives av the men, wimmen, and children in the lonely farms in the meantime."

"But," said Jack, "you don't mean to say the Breeds and Indians will set upon the settlers and the women and children in the out-of-the-way places, who don't happen to have heard of the rising?"

"That's just what they've already bin doin'," replied Terence gravely. "It's more than one family Riel and his bloody crew have

murthered since they started on the warpath. You see, Riel has told them that the Lord appeared to him and ordered that the Whites were to be entirely wiped out so that the *Metis* —Half-Breeds—His chosen people!—were to inherit the land, and, bein' ignorant, they believe it. Mind you, I'm not quite sure that Riel is not mad, and doesn't believe most of the things he tells them himself. At the same time he is a fanatic, and with all the cunning and cruelty of that type of tiger, and as such he wants dealin' wid."

"I hope they'll be all right at home," observed Jack as doubts regarding the wisdom of his leaving his own kith and kin under such circumstances suggested themselves. "But the Pembina Valley is a long way from the neighbourhood of the Saskatchewan where the worst of the trouble seems to be, and, anyhow, it's not so very far from Winnipeg if anything does happen."

"It's aisy in yer mind ye can be about that," commented Terence. "What wid the railway to the north av them, and only some thirty or forty miles from the United States, the Half-Breeds in the Pembina Valley will think twice about taking part in the ploy. Besides, the settlers outnumber the Breeds

there, and it would be easy to go into laager in the event of throuble. No, things are very different now in Manitoba from what they were fifteen years ago, when Winnipeg was Fort Garry, and General Wolseley had to get to it for the greater part of the way by canoes. Just think of it, me bhoy! In thim days this counthry was the Great Lone Land, and thir wasn't a railway within a thousand miles! Glory to goodness, just look at it to-day! To-morrow we'll be in the cars and on the way to Regina. But it's gettin' late, lad. Good-night, and a sound slape to you."

In another minute Terence O'Donohue was dead to the world.

Upon the whole, although there was much that was alarming and savoured of tragedy in what Terence O'Donohue had told Jack, there was also a good deal that was reassuring and comforting. Of course, if he had thought there was any danger of the Breeds rising on the Pembina, he would have considered it his duty to remain behind, and help protect his own people. In that case, however, his father would have been wide awake to the danger, and have undoubtedly organised a defence force amongst the neighbours. They would have gone into laager before now. No, it was

not on the Pembina River where there was occasion to fear anything. It was on the Saskatchewan, some hundreds of miles distant, where red rebellion, lawlessness, and murder were rampant. It was strange to think that most new countries in the making had to be baptized with blood before men could live peacefully in them. But, of course, that was the fault of either actively wicked or imperfect human nature, and not of the countries themselves.

How unreal it all seemed to be with a party of men on their way to engage in actual warfare! Yesterday he was only looked upon as a boy—to-day he was taking the place of a man, and would soon be face to face with one of the sternest tests of manhood. Perhaps the suddenness with which it had all been brought about accounted for the feeling of unreality.

But there were worse places in which to sleep on a cold night than a well-caulked barn knee-deep in hay, more particularly if one happened to have—as most people had in those days—a good buffalo robe as well as a blanket to lie on and cover one. With one or two exceptions, Jack's companions had dropped off to sleep. How some of them did snore, to be

sure! In two minutes more it would not have mattered to Jack if they had all been playing different tunes, in divers keys, upon copper-throated trombones. He would hardly have heard them.

CHAPTER IV

JACK VOLUNTEERS FOR DANGEROUS DUTY

THE party was up and stirring early next morning. It had frozen hard during the night, and Jack was very glad of the steaming pannikin of hot coffee and the liberal helping of appetising bacon and Boston beans which was put on his plate. There were two men who constituted themselves cooks, but it was pleasant to see how every one helped and was busy. One or two would look after the horses; another would draw water from the well—in fact those practical Westerners knew exactly what to do and how to do it. And whatever they did, they did well and thoroughly, and as if they enjoyed it. There was any amount of good-natured chaff. It was, of course, not the first time Jack had been amongst men much older than himself, and it was pleasant to be treated by them on terms of equality.

"How's the appetite, Jack?" asked Sergeant

Pollock, as they all sat around on the straw where they had slept, with full and steaming plates and pannikins before them.

"I'm really afraid of it, Sergeant," replied Jack. "I never tasted such bacon and beans or bread and coffee in my life! I haven't felt so hungry for I don't know how long."

"Then stow lots away," said the Sergeant. "That's one thing we Mounted Policemen are never restricted in. The Government sees to it that we get the best food in the country, and as much as we want of it."

"It wouldn't be much use having Mounted Police if they were not to be well looked after," observed Jack. "I fancy you've got to be a better man than the other fellow."

"That's so," laughed the Sergeant. "There is no excuse accepted for failing to do what is required of you in our force. So the Government sees to its part of the contract and keeps us fit."

In another half-hour they were on the trail again. Late that afternoon they arrived at the little village of Brandon, which, however, even then was showing distinct signs of shedding its modest buildings of wood and iron and erecting substantial and commodious ones of brick and stone instead. All around

were splendid wheat-growing farms, with fine large fields and homesteads with all the latest and most up-to-date improvements on them. And not one of them had been started or was owned by the people who had been first on the soil—the *Metis*—the Half-Breeds—who either could not or would not avail themselves of the splendid heritage which was theirs for the working. But doubtless their Indian blood inclined them more to the chase than tilling the soil or gathering together flocks and herds. Still, they must have foreseen that, as the buffalo was fast becoming extinct, and game scarcer, a new order of things was inevitable.

When the train pulled into Brandon that night, Jack was intensely interested in the motley crew of volunteers for the front that filled the cars. He managed to get his horse aboard and himself stowed into one of the long corridor cars along with Sergeant Pollock and some fifty or sixty other men. At a pretty and well-situated little place called Moosomin, that promised to develop at some future time into quite a nice town, they all got down and had supper; but they did not waste much time there. Whitehood was the next stop, and there they had hot coffee. It was now quite

late, but it was not easy to sleep under the circumstances. Still, Jack managed to snatch brief periods of broken slumber. When daylight came he noticed they were in lovely bluff country. Later in the day they reached what was then practically the end of the line—Qu'Appelle, or Troy, as some people called it. Working gangs were even then busy grading and laying the track to the west, but, so far as the passenger service was concerned, the line stopped there. It was some twenty odd miles from that point to Regina, for which the bulk of the recruits were bound.

When Sergeant Pollock and Jack, and those who had come with them, had got their horses off the cars, the Sergeant went over to the telegraph office. In ten minutes he was back again. He held a telegraph form in his hand, and the lad saw by his face that he had news of considerable importance to communicate.

"Jack," he said, "I'm afraid I can't go on to Regina with you. Between ourselves—and you'd better not say anything about it here—things look black up in the direction of Fort Pitt, a few hundred miles to the northwest, and as the telegraph wires have been cut, and the rebels are watching the country

north of Regina, they want a message taken through by dog-train from here. It's a quick way of travelling, and they've asked me to either get it sent or take it myself. Now I know the trail well, so I'm going to take it."

"And you'll go by dog-train?"

"Yes, that is the quickest means of travelling."

"Well, you'll want two sleighs; for of course one man can't go alone. I've driven dogs all my life and understand them. Why not take me?"

"Gewhiz!" exclaimed Sergeant Pollock, as he looked speculatively at the eager young face before him. "I'd take you like a shot, Jack, but, you see, you're not sworn in yet, and have had no training, and there are other things. Besides, there is the responsibility of taking you. It'll be a dangerous and ticklish job getting through to Fort Pitt, with the country full of rebels, and more than likely all the trails watched."

"It's not necessary to stick to the trails when you apprehend danger," said Jack. "The snow's quite hard enough yet on the prairie to carry a good load."

"But supposing it was to thaw—and you

know the spring thaw may set in any day now—we might be stuck up in the enemy's country and unable to get away."

"I'm a light weight compared to some of these others," said Jack, "and that is an advantage. As for being in plain clothes, that would also be an advantage supposing they happened to catch me—not, of course, that I'm thinking merely of being caught. Besides, I know French, and can talk the patois of these Half-Breeds as well as one of themselves."

"Jimini! but that's a good point!" exclaimed Sergeant Pollock, evidently thinking hard, but as yet showing no signs of agreeing with Jack's proposition.

"And I've a good head for locality," continued Jack; "and I forgot to say I can talk the Cree language as well as most natives in these parts, and I was nearly forgetting that I understand something about the sign language too."

"Quite a disturbing combination of acplishments," commented Sergeant Pollock dryly. "But supposing the Blackfoots should rise, we'd never be able to get through."

"But they haven't risen yet, and, as you said, they are unlikely to do so."

"I suppose we'll have to risk that part of

the programme," said Sergeant Pollock thoughtfully. "But seriously, Jack, I don't know that I'd be justified taking you on such a dangerous trip right away. The authorities might have something to say in the matter if anything went wrong, and there's your father and mother. Whatever could I say to them if anything did happen?"

"Sergeant Pollock, they knew quite well when I left with you that I'd have to take the same risks as any one else. Besides, really, to push through to Fort Pitt is just the one thing I could do, and enjoy doing."

"Well, just come over here with me a minute and I'll see what the Officer Commanding has to say in the matter. I won't take the responsibility myself."

They walked through the large construction camp, which presented a very busy and interesting scene indeed. They knocked at and entered a large weather-board building, and stood before a pleasant-faced and alert-looking officer who glanced up from a pile of papers which he was in the act of examining. With a minimum of words the Police Sergeant put the matter before him.

The officer looked at Jack critically.

"You say you understand driving dogs, and

you know Cree and the patois, and, anyhow, you have come to join any force which the Government may see fit to select you for ? " he queried.

" Yes, sir," replied Jack.

The officer asked one or two more questions, then turned to Sergeant Pollock.

" Be good enough to hand me that Bible, Sergeant, and we'll swear him in as a special constable. I think he'll do for this job just as well if not better than some of those others that I've just seen. But I warn you, Irwin, that I'm swearing you in to undertake a trip that is one of very exceptional difficulty and danger. Indeed, I may tell you plainly that it is ten chances to one against you and Sergeant Pollock getting through at all. In strict confidence I may also tell you that two or three men have started to get through to Fort Pitt, and Prince Albert, and other places that are at the present moment besieged by the Breeds and Indians, and nothing more has been heard of them. The natural assumption is that they have been intercepted and murdered. Once more, would you still like to have a shot at getting through with dispatches ? "

" I would, sir, because I believe I could do

it; and as for the sleighing, it's work I've been accustomed to all my life," said Jack.

"Well, that settles it," said Inspector Jarvis. "I admit you're just the sort of fellow we want for the job. There's any amount of men from down East, but few of them understand dogs, and practically none know the language of these parts. Sergeant Pollock, you'll find the dog-trains handy whenever you think you'll be able to start, and you'd better pull out early to-morrow morning. I'd advise you to go and have a look at the dogs and make all arrangements right away. Of course you'll have to disguise yourself as a Breed; and remember, Irwin, if you see you're going to be intercepted by the enemy, you'll have to get rid of the dispatches somehow. They're not very lengthy, and will be written on very fine paper. You can swallow them at a pinch. But I'll tell you what they contain, so that should you be somewhat premature in getting rid of them, you'll be able to enlighten the parties they are intended for as to their contents. Now, have you any questions to ask?"

"I'd like to see a map, sir, just to refresh my memory," said Jack.

"That's right. Get a good idea of the

country and the different trails into your head. Now take this Book."

In two minutes more Jack was duly sworn in as a special constable of the North-West Mounted Police Force, and was detailed for special duty.

"Now then, Jack," said Sergeant Pollock when they had left the room, "we must go and make ready right away. Let's first go and look at the huskies.[1] I expect there are all sorts—Whiskies, Corbeaus, Muskymotes, and a dozen others. We'll have to take a bag of dried fish for them. Then we'll see to firearms, sleeping-bags, and provisions.

[1] Dogs.

CHAPTER V

A LONELY CAMP

BEFORE it was light next morning Jack and Sergeant Pollock had drunk steaming pannikins of coffee and eaten very substantial breakfasts indeed, and were ready for the trail. The sleighs were packed securely with the minimum of baggage, and the dogs themselves had partaken of as much food as was good for them. They were all in splendid condition, and displayed the usual readiness of canines to pile on to and worry any member of the team which, for some mysterious reason, happened to be out of favour for the moment. During the trip Jack noticed that if any of these half-savage sleigh dogs met with anything that savoured of disablement, its fellows were sure to find it out and take advantage of it. They were like a good many cowardly humans in that respect. Several dogs were hitched up in each sleigh.

As for Jack's "Piper," he could not, of course, be hitched up with the sleigh dogs. He dared not even associate with them. The half-savage but in many ways intelligent creatures would have killed him in double-quick time if they had got half a chance, and Piper knew it. It was odd to see how they followed Piper's every action with a species of wondering interest, as if they were quite aware of the fact that although Piper belonged to the same species as themselves, still he was not of their class, and they could not associate with him and expect to understand him or he them. Individual members might furtively and on rare occasions exchange sniffs with him, but as for ordinary everyday companionship, that was out of the question. They were on different planes—they were creatures of burden and Piper was an aristocrat, so Piper would have to look out if he happened to put himself in their power in any way. But, of course, they were always kept tied up, and as Piper ran loose, he took very good care to give them a wide berth.

"Jack," said Sergeant Pollock, as they finished packing the sleighs and they were about to hitch the dogs up to them, "do you see those Breeds—friendly Breeds they call them—over there watching us? Just look at

them as if they didn't particularly interest you."

It was getting light now, and Jack could see them distinctly as they lounged about at the gable end of a weather-board house.

"Yes," replied Jack. "What about them?"

"Do you see the one who keeps his fur collar up over the lower part of his face?"

"Yes," replied Jack.

"Well then, just take particular stock of him, so that you'll know him again should you see him. He's a fellow called George—not a Half-Breed at all, but an Old Countryman, I believe. I feel certain he's here for no good, and that his sympathies are entirely with the Breeds. I've more than once cautioned him about running down his own countrymen. I've a good mind to put the Police here on to him, but, doubtless, they've got an eye on him. Are you ready?"

"Quite," replied Jack.

"Then jump in and follow me. Oh, there's Terence O'Donohue! Good-bye, Terence! Sorry we couldn't take you with us. Take good care of yourself."

Next minute they had started off, Sergeant Pollock in the lead. As for Terence O'Dono-

hue, he seemed to watch them in an aggrieved sort of way. Of course they had not been allowed to tell any one of their intended departure, or, in fact, anything about their perilous trip, still, it had been impossible to keep the matter secret altogether. Sergeant Pollock knew that, generally speaking, their mission and destination was unknown. The sight of the suspected renegade George was the most discomforting feature of the situation. As the Police Sergeant pulled out, he beckoned Terence O'Donohue to him, and whispered something as that individual ran alongside the sleigh for a matter of twenty or thirty yards or so. Jack noted that Terence nodded his head in a very decided fashion, as if quite agreeing with what was said to him.

The dogs were fresh, and the well-packed trail was in good order. An admonishing shout and they quickened their pace, Sergeant Pollock in the lead, and Jack some little distance behind.

It was a glorious morning, and when the sun rose it cast long shadows from the wooded bluffs across the trail. A little later, when it mounted higher, they put on their smoked glasses so as to guard against snow blindness, one of the most painful complaints it is possible

to contract. It is, as is well known in Canada, an acute inflammation occasioned by the glare of the sun. It is ophthalmia, and much the same thing as Egyptian blight.

They sped along in and out of the wooded bluffs. Here and there were little clearings, but as yet few homesteads. Before long this would be a splendid farming district, and these sloughs would furnish magnificent crops of hay. And what a wealth of berries these woods would furnish !

As it usually does in Canada, the sun shone brightly from a cloudless sky. It was now gaining considerable strength, and at any time might triumph over the Frost King and change the whole aspect of the country as if at the touch of a magician's wand. That is a somewhat hackneyed simile, but the sun and Mother Nature are magicians.

There seemed any amount of game in that neighbourhood. There were jack-rabbits without number, and prairie chickens—these splendid native grouse—were continually flying across their path. It certainly was cold, but not unpleasantly so. The keen dry air was stimulating to a degree. It had the effect of making one feel in the very pink of health, and, indeed, one could not help being that

under such conditions. Whenever Jack came to a rise, he, like Sergeant Pollock, got off the sleigh and walked alongside it. This, of course, helped to stimulate his circulation, besides giving him pleasant exercise.

Before noon they reached the beautiful Qu'Appelle Valley, and pulled up on the edge of it to reconnoitre and have a look around.

It was a magnificent valley of uniform depth, and with an average width of about a mile or so. A lovely lake hidden beneath a carpet of snow lay to the right. Beneath it, at the foot of the wooded slope, was a square stockaded fort belonging to the Hudson Bay Company. On the other side of the valley was the little settlement of Qu'Appelle proper, a mere collection of several wooden buildings. Overlooking it on the northern slope was the North-West Mounted Police Post, consisting of various buildings built in the form of a square. In the middle of the latter was a flagstaff flying the Union Jack. It was, despite its wintry aspect, a picturesque scene, and with decidedly fine features. One could imagine how lovely it would all look in the spring or summer, when the meadows and the wooded banks were green and the lakes reflected the blue sky.

"I've got a mail-bag to leave at the fort, so we'll just call in and have a bit of dinner and go on again," intimated Sergeant Pollock.

They had to get out and hold the sleighs back going down the dip, otherwise they would have run into the dogs. At the foot they got on to the frozen surface of the lake, and fairly raced across it. Then they were stopped by the sentry at the entrance to the Mounted Police Barracks, but on Sergeant Pollock disclosing his identity they were allowed to enter.

They had a warm welcome from the Police, and a piping hot and excellent meal in the large mess-room. They washed it down with pannikins of quite exceptionally good tea. In no semi-military organisation in the world is the general well-being and comfort of the men better looked after than in the Royal North-West Mounted Police Force of Canada. Certainly much is expected of its members, but from the Comptroller and Commissioner and other officers, the rank and file as a rule receive just and generous treatment. Jack thought the troopers the smartest and finest specimens of physical manhood he had ever seen. They were helpful and courteous to a degree, and would not let them do anything

for themselves. They saw to the dog-teams, and all Sergeant Pollock and Jack had to do was to take off their buffalo coats and warm themselves at the great stove which stood at one end of the mess-room. Even Piper did not escape the attentions of these kindly riders of the plains. He was brought into the mess-room and given a more than liberal allowance of excellent food right away.

It was here that Sergeant Pollock and Jack heard news of quite a disquieting nature. Innumerable settlers had been murdered by the Breeds and Indians all over the country, and the principal forts—notably Prince Albert, Battleford, Fort Pelly, and Fort Carleton—were either cut off from communication with the outside world or actually besieged. Moreover, Poundmaker and Big Bear, both Indian chiefs, with a good many of their warriors, were on the warpath. Once "blooded," neither Riel nor Dumont could control these Red-Skins, who would, undoubtedly, revert to their old-time deeds of savagery, of which scalping was merely a detail.

"What about Piapot and Muscowpetung?" asked Sergeant Pollock of one of their hosts. He turned to Jack and explained, "They are Cree chiefs, and have their reserves quite near

here, you know. Piapot is rather an interesting old fellow. He is really a Sioux Indian, having been captured from them when a child. By his brains and courage he has actually become chief of the Crees—the people who captured him. He sent over to the States and actually brought his mother over here to live with him until she died."

"Our Indians are all right as yet," replied the non-commissioned officer to whom the first part of Sergeant Pollock's speech had been addressed, "but, of course, there's no saying how long they'll remain so. It must require a good deal of self-restraint for a Niche[1] to remain neutral when he sees the usurpers of his country getting the worst of it from a people who have more in common with himself, in fact to whom he is related by blood ties."

"I quite agree with you," said Sergeant Pollock. "But men like Crow-foot and Piapot, especially Crow-foot, are really just as far-seeing, and are as much statesmen, as the most highly civilised in the world. They see the inevitable changes that must come about, and they know how it is useless to fight against them. You can be certain they will do their best to keep their people out of trouble such

[1] Indian.

as this. Whether they will succeed or not is another thing."

"Crow-foot will succeed in doing so," said a trooper, "partly because he has had the wisest of counsellors, Father Lacombe, a Roman Catholic priest; but Piapot hasn't had quite the same influence brought to bear on him. Still, I believe the old man will come out of this business all right."

"Well, I've got to call upon him at his reserve this afternoon," said Sergeant Pollock, "and I fancy I'll be able to find out how the wind blows. Jack, we'll have to hitch up again."

They thanked and said good-bye to the kindly troopers, and recrossed the valley. They followed along the high banks for a few miles, then came suddenly upon the buildings of the Indian Agency. There were a great number of tee-pees or wigwams in the immediate neighbourhood, and Indians everywhere who saluted them with that solemn immobility peculiar to the Red Man. Sergeant Pollock first called upon the agent, then went over to the large tee-pee of Piapot. Jack accompanied him. An old Indian with a grave, wise face met them at the entrance.

"How, Piapot!" [1] said the Policeman.

[1] The form of salutation.

The old Indian with native dignity held out his right hand and shook hands with the Sergeant and then with Jack. He invited them inside. The three sat down on skins facing one another, and two or three warriors came in and grouped themselves around. Sergeant Pollock then said that of course the Government could count upon the friendship and loyalty of Piapot and his Crees in the present trouble. He had merely called to assure them that as troops were at that moment on their way up to punish the rebels, they would do well to render the latter no assistance and observe a strict neutrality. The great White Mother and Queen did not wish to see her children, the Indians, drawn into the trouble or have to suffer for the misdeeds of others.

Then Piapot spoke, and Jack was filled with wonder and admiration to think that a so-called savage could not only give voice to the sentiments he did, but clothe the same in language compared to which the utterances of European statesmen were commonplace.

Piapot finished by saying: "Tell the Queen our mother that her children the Crees, though, like most children, restless at times, know when to be good children. They will take very good care not to vex her now."

They thanked and shook hands with the old chief and his warriors, and went on again. The Indian reserves were left behind, and once more they wound in and out of the bluff country. Though the sun shone brightly it was cold, and some curious crescents and bands of light showed in the sky. In fact, it seemed at one time as if there were three suns shining; but most people in Canada have seen or heard of mock suns.

The dogs kept Jack busy. At times when they slackened pace at a heavy part of the trail or at the foot of a rise, some quarrelsome huskie would snap at his neighbour or the dog immediately in front, when it would be absolutely necessary for the preservation of order to get out and cuff his ears—not very badly, of course.

"Jack," said Sergeant Pollock when at sunset they skirted the base of a wooded hill, "do you see these farm buildings on that shelf half-way up?"

Jack said he did, and asked if it was there he meditated camping for the night.

"We may as well," replied Sergeant Pollock. "You see, it's going to be a jolly cold night—a final attempt of Jack Frost to hold on to the weather—and as the dogs have had a hard day,

we've got to study them. I think we would do well to house them for the night."

"But the place seems deserted," remarked Jack. "There's not even smoke rising from the chimney."

"More than likely," assented the Sergeant. "I expect the settlers themselves have gone into Regina for protection. Indeed most people in the country have deserted their places and fled to the nearest Police Posts. I'm afraid those who haven't are those who have been murdered."

"It's too awful!" exclaimed Jack. "You make me long to meet some of these rebels."

"You'll meet them before long, or I'm very much mistaken," said the Sergeant. "At present the situation seems hopeless. Settlers murdered and scattered in all directions, and the handful of Police obliged to keep to their forts and protect the refugees that have fled to them. They can do little or nothing until the reliefs come from down East, for at present the Breeds and Indians outnumber us by something like a hundred to one. But the business of the moment is, shall we risk camping in that house for the night, or shall we keep on until after dark and camp somewhere in the bluff?"

"That is for you to say, Sergeant. It will make little difference to me," said Jack.

But that was hardly true, for every one knows that a room with a fire in it and a roof over one's head is preferable to sleeping outside in the snow, even although one has a sleeping-bag.

"Well, we'll see what the place is like," said Sergeant Pollock. "I honestly would as soon sleep in the open air—and we'll have to do it dozens of times within the next few weeks —as sleep in a room, so long as there is neither a blizzard blowing nor a thaw. But it would be as well to keep the dogs in some sort of outhouse on this our first night out, and, besides, now I think of it, I asked the fellows at the fort about this place, and they said it was all right. Of course they couldn't answer for any prowling Breeds or rebels who might be on the trail. But we'll have a look at the place first and then decide."

They were now in quite a deep-wooded valley, and the farm buildings in question were situated just below the level of the "bench," or bluff country above, and on a shelf or shoulder of land that commanded a good view of the opposite wooded hillside. Jack thought, however, that the timber came just a little too close to the outbuildings—

too close, he thought, to be exactly safe in the event of a forest fire. But this was not the time for forest fires, so that objection did not count.

They got off their sleighs, and the dogs toiled up the somewhat steep slope. A side track led from the main trail to the seemingly deserted homestead. The behaviour of Jack's dog Piper at this point was characteristic of that sagacious animal. It ran on silently ahead and sniffed suspiciously about the deserted buildings, as if to find out if anybody or anything inimical to their safety lurked there.

"Just wait here a minute or two until Piper has ascertained if the coast is clear," observed the Police Sergeant. "That's an uncommonly sagacious and useful dog of yours, Jack."

"He has always been like that," said Jack. "Look how thoroughly and systematically he does his work."

"Good old Piper!" cried the Sergeant. "He's coming back. There's nothing there at present; but he's nosing about as if he wasn't too sure about the neighbourhood."

Indeed the attitude of the dog was remarkable. The various outbuildings did not seem to give him any concern, but he looked up and down

the valley, whined in a curious, questioning sort of way, raised his head and sniffed the air as if he was not altogether too sure about things.

"He seems satisfied now," observed Jack, as the dog at length ran back to them and faced towards the homestead again.

"We'll have a look at the place and see what it's like anyhow," said Sergeant Pollock. "It will be dark in another twenty minutes."

"There will be a half-moon," observed Jack; "but the place will be in shadow for a few hours yet."

They went over to the dwelling-house. There was no lock to the door, and they pushed it open and entered. The place was fairly clean, and looked as if it had only been vacated a few hours before. There were even hot ashes in the wide fireplace. A frying-pan and a large tin kettle looked as if they had only been lately used. There was crockery and other domestic articles on the dresser and shelves. There was even a loaf of bread on the table, and what looked like a ham of bear's meat hanging from a hook in the chimney. One or two articles of clothing and bedding lay about, as if they had been left behind at the last minute.

"It's all plain enough," said Sergeant Pollock. "This place belonged to a family called Cheesman. They stuck to it, hoping against hope until the last minute, then, probably getting some news of what was happening in other parts, they cleared out in a hurry. They've doubtless gone in sleighs to Regina."

Jack made no comment. He was waiting for the Sergeant to decide whether they should camp there or continue their journey.

"I'm not saying that any place is absolutely safe in the present condition of affairs," said Sergeant Pollock at length, "but at the same time I don't see why we shouldn't be just as well off here as anywhere else. In the event of an attack the dogs would be safe, which they wouldn't be if we camped in the open, and, anyhow, we could defend ourselves. Your dog Piper can be trusted to keep a good look-out. Jack, we'll stay here for the night. Let's see to the teams, lad."

In another minute they were outside and attending to them.

CHAPTER VI

A GRIM SIEGE

THE first thing Jack and Sergeant Pollock did was to see to the comfort of the dogs. These were placed in two different outhouses, and given their suppers of dried fish.

A fire was started in the kitchen of the farmhouse, and in a remarkably short time a good meal was spread on the obviously home-made table. But first Sergeant Pollock took the precaution of boarding up the window of the room, and placing a bench on end against it.

"It's a fool's game to take chances, Jack," he said. "We'll also let Piper wander about outside. One never knows what visitors may turn up, and your dog is an excellent sentry."

It was a curious fact that as soon as Piper had finished his supper he seemed to know exactly what was required of him. He did not go and lie down in front of the fire and fall

asleep as many dogs would have done under the circumstances. He went to the door and whined to get out.

"That dog of yours is a treasure," observed the Sergeant. "You've no idea what a feeling of security he gives me."

But all the same, Jack noted that Sergeant Pollock was caution itself in all his actions. If he went to the door to look out he first extinguished the light, and then he never opened it more than a few inches at first. It was not fear, for the Sergeant's record for bravery was very high indeed, and that in a force which every one knows is distinguished for brave men. It was only the wise precaution of a man who, entrusted with an important mission, realises he has no right to endanger it by being foolhardy.

"It's only a mug's game to play into the hands of the enemy," he explained to Jack. "For instance, if that fellow George whom we saw prowling around this morning knows —as indeed he most likely does—that we are carrying important dispatches to Fort Pitt, he might make a point of following and putting some of the rebels on to us."

"It would be a bold thing for him to do, wouldn't it?" commented Jack.

"I don't know that it would particularly," replied the Sergeant. "You see, at present Louis Riel and the rebels are decidedly masters of the situation, and fellows like George know it. He is one of those who can always be reckoned upon to take the winning side. Besides, being a crook and a discontented spirit, he hates the Police and all forms of constituted authority. He has been cautioned more than once—once too often in fact—and I'm pretty certain he would go out of his way to do me a bad turn if he could."

"You once had trouble with him?" said Jack.

"Not exactly, but I stopped him just in time as he was about to get into very considerable trouble. You see, in our force we like to give a fellow a chance. In some cases it works well, in others it doesn't. He proved one of the ungrateful ones. He is brimming over with conceit and belief in himself, which in a crook like him generally means disaster sooner or later. I believe he has it in for me."

"And perhaps he wants to distinguish himself by getting possession of our dispatches. But how can he know we have dispatches?"

"Tut, tut!" laughed Sergeant Pollock.

"He knew jolly well that we weren't starting out on a pleasure trip. Any one who saw us leave must have had a pretty good guess that we were out to run the blockade—to carry important information through to the forts cut off by the rebels. You've got those duplicates I gave you, Jack?"

"Yes, the ones done up in tiny rolls of tissue paper which I can swallow at a pinch."

"Well, keep them handy in case of accidents. I hope, however, your digestive organs will be spared. I gave you duplicates, because when the time comes to try and get through the rebel lines into Fort Pelly, we'll have to separate and try and get into the fort by different routes. We will thus have a double chance of getting these dispatches through. If one is collared the other may get in. For instance, knowing the ropes as I do, I'll create a distraction, and that will draw them from you. When they come to deal with me I've got a little surprise for them—but it's no use speaking about that now."

While they had been talking the Sergeant had also been enjoying his pipe. They had cleared away the remains of the supper, and made things shipshape for an early start next morning. They would have some hot

coffee and the usual bacon and Boston beans with the remainder of the yeast bread they had brought with them, and then start out on the trail again. But they would not keep to the trail. They would be in the enemy's country, and Sergeant Pollock would have to rely upon his bump of locality—his bushmanship, in other, if seemingly inappropriate, words—to steer over the trackless prairie and wind in and out of the bluff country, while always remembering to pick up the right direction again. One would have to avoid any settlements lest they should happen to be occupied by the enemy. They had indeed their work cut out to get through safely. But perhaps one of the most disastrous things that could happen to them would be a sudden thaw, for in that case they would be stranded with their dogs on the prairie. It would be like finding themselves at sea in a small boat without either sails or oars.

"Jack," said Sergeant Pollock, "I think we'd better get into our sleeping-bags, but it won't do to camp in here in case of a visit from the enemy. There's a place like a granary over there which ought to be all right. In fact, I took stock of it when we first came, and saw that it was in order."

Jack thought it was rather hard lines that they should have to leave that comfortable kitchen, warmed up as it had been by a good fire, to go and sleep in a bare, cheerless, draughty outhouse. But of course he did not say so. He merely picked up his bag and intimated that he was quite ready for a move.

They put out the light, then going through the adjoining room opened a door, and passed into a species of long shed. From it they entered a stable, and went out into the open air.

The moon was just showing over the opposite side of the valley, flooding it with a wan light. Because of the snow on the ground, one could see distant objects with considerable distinctness. The trees stood out black as ink against it.

"Keep in the shadow, Jack," said Sergeant Pollock, as he hugged a low wall that stretched over to the outhouse for which they were bound. "Whether there's any one watching us or not, it's always as well to be careful."

They reached and passed into the outhouse, which was evidently used as a granary. It had a hard and dry mud floor, and seemed quite clean. In a corner was a little pile of

hay. There were two tiny windows in the building some few feet from the ground.

"Take some of that hay to put under you, Jack," said the Sergeant. "I carried it here for that purpose when you were feeding the dogs. We mustn't show a light, but I think that with the glimmer from those two small windows we can manage."

They spread the hay out, so as to keep their sleeping-bags off the cold clay, rested their rifles against the wall close to their heads, and closed the door. The Sergeant peeped out through the small casement that commanded a view of the dwelling-house and other buildings.

"Your dog Piper doesn't seem exactly happy," observed the Sergeant. "He ought to be sound asleep under that stack of hay by now after the run he has had to-day. All the huskies—the sleigh dogs—are in the land of dreams by this time."

But Jack knew the restless ways of Piper when in strange quarters, and attached no significance to the fact. He knew that Piper would soon snuggle into that hay-stack and make himself quite comfortable, unless his uncannily sharp doggy senses told him that something which had no right to be there was

stirring in his immediate neighbourhood. By this time Jack was feeling uncommonly drowsy. What with having been up before daylight, and the long drive in the keen fresh air, he could hardly keep his eyes open. He crawled into his sleeping-bag, bade the Sergeant good-night, and promptly went to sleep.

He could not have told afterwards how long he had been asleep, but it seemed to him that hardly any time at all had elapsed before he was awakened by a hand which gently shook him, and an admonishing voice—that of Sergeant Pollock—which said—

"Jack, Jack, don't make a row, but listen. Piper spots something coming!"

In another moment Jack was wide awake. At first, however, there was some confusion in his ideas. What could be coming at that time of night or morning, whichever it might happen to be! Then somehow or other he thought of those precious dispatches which he carried, and he remembered what his companion had said about the traitorous George playing into the hands of the enemy.

"Just get out of your sleeping-bag, Jack, and have a careful peep through that window —don't show yourself, mind—and I'll have a

look through this one. Get your gun, but don't fire unless I tell you."

It was all very sudden and disconcerting to say the least of it, this being confronted with a possible enemy at such an early stage of their journey. But the lad realised that he was out on very serious business indeed, and that upon the success of his mission depended many valuable lives. Sergeant Pollock had led him to understand, without unduly alarming him, that it was quite possible the enemy, if only they were certain of the work upon which he was engaged, would stick at nothing to thwart their enterprise. Death was a certainty if they were caught. The leaders of the rebels knew their cause was too desperate to pay any attention to the ordinary usages of warfare—even if they knew anything about civilised warfare. These dispatches doubtless meant news that would encourage the besieged forts to hold out. If only those isolated garrisons could be led to believe that no help could possibly reach them until it would be too late, they would surrender, and that would release the besiegers to help subdue the other forts, not to speak of the great moral effect it would exercise upon all parties concerned. Any reliefs could then be met by a concentrated

body of Breeds, and in all likelihood lured far from their base and eventually and effectively wiped out.

It was absolutely certain that the spies of the enemy, such as George and some others, would make extraordinary efforts to capture and kill them.

"Jack," said Sergeant Pollock, "come here and tell me if you can distinguish anything under these trees. Fancy plays such tricks with even one's sight when one half expects to see something. We'll exchange windows."

What Jack saw through that tiny casement was disconcerting, to say the least of it. Piper was standing some sixty or seventy yards distant between two low walls of cord-wood and facing one of the outhouses, close up to which came a point of the dark pine-wood. Something invisible in the shadow was exercising Piper considerably. His back was arched, and Jack knew, though, of course, he could not see, that his hair stood on end with apprehension and rage. A deadly enemy was concealed in the shadows, and Piper knew it. Undoubtedly the dog saw the foeman that the humans could not perceive. Piper did not bark; he only uttered low, warning

growls, and advanced slowly on the lurking enemy.

"Jack," said Sergeant Pollock, "there's some one approaching the dwelling-house from the side of the corral."

"Then there are people coming from both sides," said Jack, "for I can distinctly see a couple of men on the edge of the wood. They've left it, and have come over to the house."

It was only too true, and in the clear moonlight Jack could see them distinctly. The two skulking figures wore thick fur coats, and carried rifles. Both wore tuques, which, for the enlightenment of English readers, may be briefly described as knitted woollen caps terminating in a tassel, and long scarves wound round their waists. They were obviously Breeds.

"I'd say call your dog in or they'll put a bullet into him," said Sergeant Pollock; "at the same time one doesn't want to let them know where one is. There are evidently several of them."

"They think we are in the house, and they intend to burn us out. Oh, look there!"

There had indeed been more of the enemy in the immediate neighbourhood than they had at first imagined, for at that moment a bright,

ruddy glow showed through the casement of the outhouse, which was practically a continuation of the dwelling-house. The miscreants had evidently entered by a door in the rear of the building and set fire to it, which, seeing it contained a considerable quantity of dry hay and straw, was a very easy thing to do. There was a loud crackling sound, and in another minute the fire had spread with a rapidity that was startling. The construction of the place was such that it had simply leaped and run along the low range of buildings from one end to the other. In less time than it takes to tell it, the fire had a firm grip of the outhouses.

"Call in your dog, Jack, or some of these chaps will——"

There was a bang somewhere near at hand, and a bullet whizzed through the air before the Sergeant could complete his sentence. Piper sprang upwards on all fours, then spun round. It was a close call for Jack's dog. The bullet just succeeded in breaking the skin and no more. But Piper had no intention of taking the attempt on his life, figuratively, lying down. He made a rush into the shadow, and in another moment there was a veritable pandemonium of shrieks, yells, and curses. Piper had made

straight for the throat of his would-be assassin and was worrying the life out of him.

Jack would certainly have left the hut and gone to see fair play for Piper, unthinking of the consequences, had not Sergeant Pollock promptly stopped him.

"Stay where you are, Jack," he commanded. "Piper can be depended upon to look after himself. You've got to think of these dispatches, and take care of yourself."

The Police Sergeant was right. Jack had no business to imperil the safety of the papers he carried to go and help a dog, even although that dog was the faithful Piper. His duty had to come first.

It was characteristic of the rebels that they should not worry about their comrade in distress. What they wanted was the dispatches, which they knew were carried by the two Mounted Policemen. They must have them at any price, and, to do them justice, they exhibited considerable bravery in attempting to get them. They evidently concluded that the Police in the house had been surprised and overcome by the smoke and flames, for a couple of them were seen to enter at the far end of the building, evidently with the

intention of penetrating to the kitchen and securing the bodies. It was, indeed, a bold, not to say foolhardy, thing to do.

"If they don't look out they'll get trapped in that house," said Sergeant Pollock. "But I must make certain that these fellows are rebels. You see, we've only taken it for granted that they are. Open that door an inch or two, Jack. Place your hat and cloak on the barrel of your rifle, and show it a little. But keep well back—don't get hit. I'll do the shooting if required."

Next minute Jack had done as directed, and Sergeant Pollock, rifle in hand and in the shadow, stood by, ready to act.

"Hello there!" he yelled. "Who are you, and what do you want?"

For the moment so taken aback were the Breeds at being hailed from a quarter which they certainly had not taken into consideration at all, that they stood motionless and as if paralysed. But it was only for a moment. Breeds do not usually suffer from nerves. Realising, as they might have done before had they only considered, that it was not likely a man of Sergeant Pollock's experience was going to allow himself to be trapped in a dwelling-house when there was

anywhere else in which he might escape observation, they promptly put their rifles to the shoulder and fired at what they took to be the Sergeant himself in the doorway.

But hardly had their bullets struck the dummy Jack had rigged out, and embedded themselves in the lintels, than Sergeant Pollock also fired. One of the rebels dropped where he stood. The other turned to make himself scarce when the Sergeant fired again. This time the Breed dropped his rifle, clapped his hands to the lower part of his body, and spun round and round, cursing and shouting in his agony. Then he suddenly staggered, and fell forward on his face.

"Now, Jack, pull in your dummy and shut that door," cried the Sergeant. "Shoot at everything you can spot, but don't expose yourself a moment longer than is absolutely necessary. Hello! Here's Piper! We must open the door again. Come in, Piper, old boy!"

The dog had evidently disposed of the rebel that had attempted his life, for between gleaming teeth he carried a large piece of cloth, doubtless torn from an assailant's wearing apparel. He laid the same at the feet of his master.

"You'll now stop where you are, Piper,"

cried Jack. "I can't afford to lose you at the hands of these blackguards. Hello, I'm afraid we're in for a siege!"

As he spoke, two or three bullets embedded themselves in the door of the granary, and one came in at the little window where Jack's face had been only a minute or two before.

"You see, Jack, we'll have to look out," said the Sergeant. "Here is a space between this crazy door and the lintel where you'll be able to see what's going on. Hello, I believe something has happened to those fellows in the house!"

Something had indeed happened, and, literally as well as figuratively, with a vengeance. To Jack and the Sergeant, who had noticed how the house was built, the situation was plain enough. The two Breeds, in their determination to find the bodies of the Mounted Policemen and get the dispatches, had penetrated to the kitchen of the house. From this room there was no escape, for the Sergeant had taken good care when he left to fix the two doors so that it would be impossible to open them from the inside. With professional acumen he had foreseen contingencies which would not have occurred to the lay mind.

"Jack," cried Sergeant Pollock, "I believe those fellows in the house have done themselves in the eye this time."

"I know how it is," said Jack. "You remember that straw or fodder piled up between the dwelling-house proper and those off-rooms? Well, it has become such a furnace that it has cut off their retreat. Look! they're trying to break down the door! Why don't these other Breeds help them? Sergeant Pollock, we can't see these men burned to death before our eyes."

Before the Sergeant could stop him Jack had stepped outside. Next moment there was a *ping* and a *zip*, and the excited lad realised that he had escaped death by only an inch or so. At considerable danger to himself his companion seized and pulled him back into safety.

"Keep your head, Jack," was all Sergeant Pollock said. "Do you imagine for one moment that these devils are going to miss having a shot at us, because two of their number are paying the penalty of their foolhardiness with their lives?"

And this was warfare! Despite the fact that these rebels were there to kill them if they could, and had, indeed, made a very

good attempt to do so, it was horrible to think that two of them were trapped in that burning building, and that there were none who would make an effort to rescue them. All they had to do was to break down that door—it could be done with a large stone or a stout post used as a battering ram—and allow them to escape. True, they might be fired on, but surely better the risk of death by a nimble bullet than the prospect of being roasted alive!

"We'd be too late in any case," observed Sergeant Pollock. "Look, there goes the window! They've either dislodged those boards with which we barricaded it, or the fire has done it for them. Now, if these wretched Breeds would only attempt a rescue, I'd call a truce for the time being. Stand back for a minute, Jack."

Sergeant Pollock put his hands to his mouth and shouted to the enemy, but the only response was a couple of bullets that came desperately near him. The Mounted Policeman noted the flashes that momentarily lit up the doorway of an outhouse to the left of them. Quick as thought he lifted his rifle and fired a couple of shots at the spot.

"I guess that fetched them!" he said. "You see, Jack, it is war to the knife with

these fellows. They will neither take quarter nor give it. I expect they represent the worst element amongst the enemy. I wouldn't wonder if they are some of those chaps—outlaws and mercenaries—who have come from the neighbourhood of the frontier, and are simply out for plunder. Otherwise I can't account for them being here so near to Qu'Appelle, the present terminus of the Canadian Pacific Railway."

Whichever way it was, there was no getting away from the fact that the enemy had suddenly appeared in a quarter where danger had been hardly expected. Their recent victories had doubtless emboldened them, and they underestimated the resources of the Canadian Government. But it was an old story in the annals of colonial history. Those "lesser breeds without the law" seemed incapable of acquiring wisdom unless it was driven home to them in the shape of a sharp and salutary lesson.

And now the doomed house from one end to the other was a mass of flames that shot high up into the air, and dissipated the shadows which the moonlight had created. The log and weather-board walls burned fiercely. Already in some places the long, low roof had fallen in. From the outhouses where the

team-dogs were confined could be heard weird yelps and cries as the poor brutes, awakened from their slumbers by the unwonted turmoil, gave expression to their excitement and alarm. It was upon these outhouses that Sergeant Pollock kept the sharpest look-out. He thought it more than likely that the enemy might endeavour to harm the dogs. Of course their first thought would be to kill the men to whom the dogs belonged. But in the event of them realising that their attack might fail, they would certainly try to destroy their means of locomotion. The Mounted Police would then be practically at their mercy.

"Jack," cried Sergeant Pollock suddenly, "there's a fellow just managed to sneak behind that wall. He's got some lighted hemp in his hand, and I think his game is to approach this building from the gable end on your side and set fire to it. And, by George, here's another going to try on the same game on this side! Now, just keep cool, Jack, and we'll give these fellows the time of their lives!"

CHAPTER VII

A BUGLER OF PARTS

It seemed now as if Sergeant Pollock and Jack, not to mention Piper, were doomed, for it was evident that in order to get a shot at either of the two rebels advancing to set fire to the building, they would have to go outside and expose themselves. Of course it was certain that, at that moment, more than one Breed was waiting and watching the doorway to pick them off as soon as they showed there.

But Jack had kept tolerably cool, as Sergeant Pollock had advised him to, so that his wits did not desert him. Indeed, they served him in good stead at this critical juncture. He had noticed an axe just within the doorway when they had entered. To seize it and make an attack upon a spot where two logs met at the gable end was the work of a minute or two. He was a good axeman, and the chips

flew. Then he saw moonlight through the space he had made.

Next moment that light was obscured and a fiery glow showed there instead. The Breed had seen the crevice, and, doubtless, thought it would be a good place to start his conflagration. But in his excitement or stupidity he did not keep his bulky body sufficiently clear of that little opening as he ought to have done. Jack, of course, could not see it, but he hoped it might be there.

Next moment Jack's rifle barrel was within an inch of the rough and ready torch, and he pulled the trigger. There was a flash and a deafening roar. Before the latter had subsided the aggressive Breed lay sprawling on the snow outside with a bullet in his thigh. It was unnerving, to say the least of it, to hear the cry he gave before lapsing into unconsciousness. His improvised torch lay blazing in the snow.

"Well done, Jack!" cried Sergeant Pollock. "That was a bright idea, but it won't work at this end—the logs are nearly a foot thick and close together. Just open that door a foot or two and stand well back."

What it was Sergeant Pollock intended doing Jack could only conjecture. The situation was desperate, and, doubtless, the Mounted

Policeman realised there was less danger in risking a sortie than allowing some one to burn them out. Before he could act, however, Piper again asserted himself as a factor to be reckoned with, and probably saved his life. Since Piper had been induced to enter with them, and particularly since he knew that the enemy was close up to the building doing something of an inimical nature—from Piper's point of view—his restlessness had been very pronounced indeed. Now that Jack did as he was told and partially opened the door, Piper seized his opportunity. He was out between the Sergeant's legs before one could say Jack Robinson.

Bang! Bang! A couple of rifle shots rang out that very same instant from the undergrowth alongside the pines, and embedded themselves in the door and uprights. But quick as these shots were, they were not quick enough for Piper. He was off and round the building so quickly that it was almost impossible to follow him, far less draw a bead on, and shoot him.

Next moment, for the second time that night, there was a pandemonium that would have waked the dead. The Breed with one hand holding the flaming torch close to the

eaves of the building so as to set it alight, and with the other grasping his rifle, was the principal performer. Jack's dog was an able second. Before the Breed could drop the torch and use his gun, Piper had seized him by the back of the neck, biting through the upturned fur collar, and, incidentally, dragging bunches of the rebel's long, snaky hair literally out by the roots. When the sorely astonished enemy somewhat recovered from the paralysing effect of the unexpected and furious onslaught, he shot up his hands as best he could and tried to grasp the dog. But Piper snapped and bit at these same hands with whole-hearted enthusiasm. The wretched man fairly yelled with rage and consternation. Even the roaring and crackling that came from the burning house could not drown the expression of his desperate plight.

"Piper is letting him have it!" cried Jack, who, of course, could not see all that was going on. "Well done, Piper!"

"No need to encourage him," cried the Sergeant, grinning, despite the gravity of their position. "That dog of yours, Jack, can get a rustle on with any dog I ever knew. Hello! there goes the roof of the shack!"

It was only what might have been expected

from the rapidity and fierceness of the fire. There was a cracking and rending sound, and the entire building seemed to sway. Next moment the greater part of the roof fell in. A picturesque shaft of swirling and glowing sparks shot high into the air. No living thing could possibly be within these reeling and burning walls now. While they were gazing upon the wild scene from discreet points of vantage, keeping an eye the while upon what space they could see round the building, Piper suddenly dashed into the room. Between his jaws he held something that looked like a dripping rag. He entered confidently and laid it at Jack's feet.

"Piper!" cried Jack. "If your motives weren't perfectly sincere, and you hadn't behaved like a hero, I'd teach you better manners. Take that thing away quick, I tell you! Do you think I'm a savage?"

Of course in that dim light Jack could not distinguish objects very clearly, but he could guess at the colour of the thing that looked like a wet rag, and it made him shudder.

Piper looked surprised and disappointed with Jack. He slowly moved to the door, and dropped his trophy outside.

"Jack!" said Sergeant Pollock after a pause, during which they had kept a sharp look-out so as to guard against surprise, "what between ourselves and the fire we've accounted for five of the enemy. It would be interesting to know how many of the beggars there are. Hello! there goes one of them to try and get to the dogs!"

He put his rifle to his shoulder and pulled the trigger. Jack could hear the hoarse ejaculation of the Breed as he lurched forward, and fell sprawling on his face with a bullet in him.

"There's a bit of shadow just there," observed the Sergeant quietly, "and that prevented me seeing him at first. That makes the sixth."

"Better shut the door and put something up against it," cried Jack. "They are going to try and rush us, and they are doing it where it will be impossible for us to get a fair shot at them."

"Give me that axe, quick!" cried Sergeant Pollock. "Now stand back, Jack, and give me elbow-room."

Sergeant Pollock, like most Canadians who had been brought up in country districts, knew how to use an axe. In the present instance he wielded it to such good advantage, that

A COUPLE OF BREEDS STOOD IN THE DOORWAY.

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within a few minutes he had made a loophole through which Jack could put his rifle and command his end of the building. Then the Sergeant swung round and made a loophole for himself. He had hardly completed it when the door was dashed in by a heavy beam, and a couple of Breeds stood framed in the doorway with rifles at the ready. The two defenders, of course, had not been able to watch all four sides.

Fortunately for Jack and the Sergeant the interior, save where the moonlight and the flare from the burning house streamed through the doorway, was in darkness, and the enemy paused nonplussed and irresolute for the moment. And that moment was their undoing.

"Stand back, Jack!" again cried Sergeant Pollock, and next moment he had hurled the axe he held in his hand right at the foremost Breed. The rebel was struck on the breast by the heavy, whirling blade and dropped where he stood. Before the second rebel could put his gun to his shoulder, Jack had fired upon him and missed. The Breed made a rush into the hut. He realised it was his only chance. He would be shot if he stood longer in the doorway, and he knew he had no time to beat a retreat.

A hand-to-hand struggle was forced upon him. It was rather more than he had bargained for. He could not see to shoot. All he could do was to grab whichever of the defenders first presented himself, and use him as a species of battering ram with which to fell the other. He was a powerful fellow with a mighty frame and muscles to match. He knew that he was much more than an equal for most men. But he had not taken a boy into account.

As he rushed into the building, rifle in hand, Jack shot out his right foot. The giant tripped over it, and pitched head first into the room. His head struck the opposite wall with a force that ought to have cracked it or broken his neck. Before he could recover himself Jack had jumped on top of him, and, seizing his head with both hands, bumped it against the hard floor with such whole-hearted energy that the Breed could hardly have known what was happening. Jack felt the great limbs slacken and become limp. The boy released his hold upon him.

"Jack," cried Sergeant Pollock, "stand by. I believe they are coming in force. It's a pity they've knocked the door in. We must fix it on its side across the lower part of

the doorway. Don't expose yourself more than you can possibly help, and don't waste a shot."

It was evident that the remaining half-dozen Breeds or so, enraged by the thought that a man and a boy had contrived to render half of their number *hors de combat,* were determined to rush and put an end to the siege at any cost. The two in the hut could not kill them all. It was absolutely imperative that they should be captured or slain without further waste of time. It was only because they had not rushed the building and acted together that the defenders had succeeded in punishing them as they had done. It was indeed maddening to think how they had allowed themselves to be outgeneralled. They must retrieve the situation at any cost.

"Jack, hurry up and shove those dispatches of yours between two uprights—they won't see them there, and we can get them again if we pull through. Remember, don't waste a shot or a blow, and we may best them yet. Hello!"

They stood speechless with astonishment and listened. If they had known it was the last trumpet they heard instead of the long-drawn-out and somewhat erratic notes of a

bugle, they could not have been more taken aback. The strange sounds seemed to come from the neighbourhood of the trail across the valley. Then a couple of shots rang out in succession, and a wild cheer arose that sent the blood pulsing through their veins. The advancing Breeds paused irresolute for a moment, then turned tail and fled for their lives. They must have thought it was a regiment of cavalry coming.

"It's the Mounted Police," cried Sergeant Pollock, "and they've just come in time! But where on earth, I wonder, did they pick up that bugler?"

To Sergeant Pollock's trained and regimental ear, the distressful attempts to sound familiar calls upon that bugle almost overpowered the great wave of relief and thanksgiving that surged up within him. He had made sure the end had come, but salvation had arrived instead! Like Jack, he could hardly grasp it all at once, though the full sense and import of it would come later. But it is generally so in the great crises of our lives —it is the little and irrelevant things that seem to stand out for the time being. And that is a wise provision.

"Now then, Jack, just send up a cheer to

let the reliefs know we're here, and blaze into these rebels," cried Sergeant Pollock.

But the Sergeant did not exactly do what he himself advocated, for he ran out of the hut and began firing upon the quickly disappearing Breeds. Jack, however, cheered, and managed to shoot as well. It was a delightful and heartening thing to be chasing and firing upon the very men who had for the last hour or two been giving them such an uncomfortable time, to say the least of it. As the Breeds were evidently fleet of foot, they soon disappeared over the wooded hillside. Doubtless they had sleighs cached in some convenient place, where they would soon pick them up and be off.

"Just keep firing a shot or two into the timber, Jack, to keep them on the hop," cried the Sergeant. "Yes, they are going. That's Piper after them. There's not much fear of them dropping behind on the chance of getting a shot at us with him at their heels. But here come the first of the reliefs."

They ran forward to greet the fur-clad figure seated in a little box-sleigh. Indeed the latter was so small that it was little better than a soap-box, and hardly worthy the name. It was pulled by a gaunt but wiry-looking

cayuse. The driver pulled up when he reached the level. No sooner had he done so than he drew a bugle from his breast, put it to his lips, and blew a discordant blast upon the same.

It was, indeed, a painful performance. The bugler was obviously an utter tyro at his business. They could not distinguish his features.

"We're glad to see you, sir, whoever you are!" cried Sergeant Pollock, somewhat puzzled at the decidedly unregimental appearance of the newcomer. Still, the man sported a bearskin with a yellow badge. "You're just in the nick of time for us. But where are the rest of you—the Police?"

"Shure, an' dhivil a wan but mesilf, Sergeant dhear; and how many men like mesilf would ye be wantin'?"

"Terence O'Donohue, by all that's wonderful!" exclaimed Sergeant Pollock. "What on earth brought you on here, Terence? But you don't mean to say you're here all by yourself—that you made all that—— But we are jolly glad to see you, Terence, and put it there!" He held out his hand and seized the little Irishman's. "You've just saved the situation, my boy. They were rushing us when the

sound of your bugle caused them to alter their minds. But how is it you managed to hit it off so nicely ? "

" Tut, tut ! " exclaimed Terence. " Shure, didn't I see, and didn't you see, that turn-coat George and them other fellers prowlin' 'round when you left, and didn't I know they were worth watching ! So when I saw them leave Qu'Appelle on the quiet-like by ones and twos, I just off and tells the Captain what was what. It so happened he wanted a message took to Fort Carlton mighty badly, and as he hadn't any men to spare, and he knew me, he asked me if I could do it. You see, I know the counthry and the Breeds and the Injins, so I could pull through where others would get stuck. So I took on the job, an' knew that if I kep' on I'd make up on you sooner or later. You see, you had to go to Fort Qu'Appelle, and I gave the place a miss. I knew where I could pick up your tracks later on, an' I've done it. That's all."

" You've done magnificently, Terence, and I'm not going to attempt to thank you now," said Sergeant Pollock soberly. " Just look at what has happened ! "

" If you'll take my advice, Sergeant, you'll pull out of this at wance, imejit. You don't

want to stop in this place five minutes longer than you can help. Them fellers are pretty shure to come back here spyin' as soon as it gets light, and it won't do to let them know it was only Terence O'Donohue who was bugler and Commander-in-Chief and a Comp'ny of Horse all in wan that comed to the relief of ye this blessed mornin'. Besides, they might like to have a chance of lookin' afther some av them they've left behind. But it's past the needs av a midical man, I'm thinkin', they are now."

"You're right, Terence, we're in an awkward position here should the enemy come back. So we'll hitch up the dogs and pull out without further ado. Jack, get a rustle on."

Within half an hour they had fed the huskies and packed up their belongings, not forgetting to recover the dispatches from the place where they had hidden them when they thought it was possible the fight might end disastrously for them.

The dwelling-house was still burning fiercely, and by its light they hitched up the teams. They had passed through a terrible ordeal, but they had done so triumphantly, and that was surely a matter for congratulation. Still, the shadow of all that had happened was upon

them. There were certain aspects of the late struggle they would never be able to forget as long as they lived. But the wayward and ill-advised Breeds who had rushed to their doom had courted their fate. It would have been foolish on the part of either Jack or Sergeant Pollock to have had any reflections upon that score. They had been deliberately marked down by their would-be murderers, and although they had succeeded in standing them off for some considerable time, and inflicting very severe losses upon them, they would undoubtedly have been murdered in the end but for the timely arrival of that brave if unconventional mortal, Terence O'Donohue. But Sergeant Pollock would see to it that the plucky little Irishman did not go unrewarded.

As for Terence O'Donohue himself, he evidently recognised the necessity of getting out of that neighbourhood as quickly as possible, and dwelling as little as he could upon the serious side of the situation, for he was helpful to a degree, and as inconsequent and absurd in his remarks as any fun-loving Irishman could well be.

"And when did you turn bugler, Terence?" asked Sergeant Pollock when they were hitching up the dogs.

"Shure, and didn't ye know that I belonged to a musical family?" was the sober reply. "The grandfather av me played the drum in the band av the Connaught Rangers, and me father performed on the bellows av the big organ in the Church of St. Gabriel's at Montreal."

"Well, it was a good idea, Mr. O'Donohue," said Jack, "and it scared the life out of them. They thought it was a troop of Mounted Police or soldiers coming."

"An' that's what I meant them to think. You see, I'm takin' that bugle through to Carlton, and, by the powers, I've a mind to stick to it. It's been stickin' to my lips wance or twice, I can tell ye—when I forgot to keep the mouthpiece warm. Oh yes, music and wind and elbow-grease have always been my motto by that same token."

Jack shouted to his dogs to create a distraction, and the party started off. The Sergeant was in the lead, Jack followed, and the little Irishman brought up the rear. He would travel with them to a point south of Saskatoon, when he would branch off to the right. They reached the top of the valley without mishap, and glad they were when they stood on the level again.

"We must keep to the trail, Jack, as O'Donohue's cayuse daren't get off it," cried Sergeant Pollock. "The dogs are fairly fresh, so we'll do a good stage before we stop for breakfast."

CHAPTER VIII

"LAURIER"

ONLY that Sergeant Pollock knew the country in that district, it would have been easy to have got off the main trail in the semi-darkness. They met with two or three which branched off evidently to outlying ranches. They kept on in silence, and after an hour or so it became evident that dawn was near at hand. The stars went out one by one, and a wan greyness filled that lonely, snow-clad land. At first they had been apprehensive lest they should fall in with some of their late attackers, but no enemy showed up. To Jack there was an air of unreality about that early drive; and 'twixt the dawn and the dark the wings of Time are heavy. The tragic and lurid events of the previous night seemed more like the happenings of some horrible nightmare than aught else. It was difficult to realise that he

and his companion had been so closely menaced by death. The horrors of rebellion were very patent to him now.

When the sun at last peeped over the edge of the rolling prairie behind them, they had put a good many miles between themselves and the scene of the previous night's grim doings. They passed one or two lonely-looking farmhouses, but no life stirred there. They seemed, as indeed they were, deserted. The occupants had fled to places of safety. When they came abreast a little homestead a few hundred yards off the trail that commanded a good view of the surrounding country, Sergeant Pollock slowed up, and sent Piper on ahead to do a little scouting. The soldier-policeman, mindful of that sagacious animal's exertions on the previous night, had made a point of taking Piper into the sleigh with him.

Piper, as usual, seemed quite to understand what was required of him. He jumped off and made straight for the house and out-buildings. He seemed to make a thorough examination of the premises, and nosed around in quite a professional way. Then he left them, and, standing on a little rise where they could see him, wagged his tail.

"It's all right," said the Sergeant. "We'll go in and have a wash and a kettleful of tea. I expect Terence O'Donohue has no objections."

They first saw to the comfort of the dogs, and O'Donohue succeeded in finding a feed of oats and much good hay for his angular but wiry-looking broncho. One peculiarity of this animal was that it would allow no man save its master to approach it. It was a decidedly misleading horse, to say the least of it. Its normal attitude was one of deep dejection and melancholy. It looked as if it only wanted to be alone so that it might lean up against a wall or a stack of hay and moralise. But if any one, deceived by its appearance, was tempted to go anywhere within reach of its heels or its beak-like nose, there was trouble right away. All of a sudden it was galvanised into life. It would kick out or turn and bite with such a sudden and ferocious access of energy, that one wondered how any living thing could approach within yards of it and live. But as soon as the fit of activity had passed, it looked as if it only wanted to go to sleep again. Jack was to get an exhibition of its somewhat disturbing qualities later on. Terence, of course, took care to warn the lad

concerning them. As for the Irishman himself, he had got to understand and knew how to deal with the creature's idiosyncrasies. Master and horse preserved a species of armed neutrality towards each other. Terence had picked the animal up, figuratively, for an old song, as no one cared to risk their lives by keeping it. He had re-christened the creature "Laurier," after the Canadian statesman of that name. Terence's horse had one great virtue—it was a stayer, and would have kept on going without requiring physical persuasion till collapsing altogether. No quadruped in the North-West could travel as far, and on so little food, when necessity decreed, and none could make greater inroads on a bag of oats or a stack of hay when an opportunity presented itself.

They entered the dwelling-house, and had a wash and a good breakfast, and then went on again. That night they camped in a deserted homestead some little distance off the trail. Next day they crossed Long Lake, and camped in the open on its banks. On the following day they met with a disquieting adventure.

They were ascending a slight rise when suddenly Piper, who was trotting alongside Jack's sleigh, became violently excited and ran on ahead, growling ominously.

"Have your rifle handy, Jack," cried Sergeant Pollock; "there are Breeds or Indians about. But don't let them see that you're apprehensive about them."

The words were hardly out of his mouth before three Indians and three Breeds appeared on the trail on the crest of the rise some fifty yards or so ahead of them. With rifles at the ready they spread out on the wind-swept crest, galloped up, and closed on them. Sergeant Pollock pulled up his dogs, but did not move a muscle.

"Hello!" he said to the foremost Breed, "you're a long way from home, Michelle. Where are you bound for?"

"I go for the rest of those cattle that you said two, maybe three, months ago I must not take or there would be trouble. *Mon Dieu!* but it is my turn now to be what you call it, Boss! Where you go?"

"Michelle, you'll finish up yet on that gallows-tree that I told you about, as sure as my name's Dan, if you keep on," said the Sergeant quietly to the furtive-eyed Breed in a peculiarly concentrated fashion that made the object of it blink and look uncomfortable. "Didn't I stop you from committing—well,

you know what—and save you from a pile of trouble when I might as well have made you my prisoner? And didn't you promise that if I let you go you would never?—you know what again—and now you are out in open rebellion against the Government, and talking like this!"

"It is the turn of the *Metis* to talk," replied the swarthy, dark-eyed Breed. "We are going to keep all this land for ourselves. And now you are my prisoner, and only because I believe you did try to do me a good turn once, I will not shoot you. Yes, you three are all our prisoners, but it may be so that we shall kill you later on."

"Michelle, I don't know why I should trouble to explain things to you as I do," said Sergeant Pollock slowly, and as if the matter tired him, without either anger or fear. "Perhaps it is because I have some little pity for you in my heart, seeing that some of the same blood that runs in the veins of my race also runs in yours. But you must not try me overmuch. If you are wise you will go home, and tell those others that what they are doing is worse than madness. Take my word for it, Michelle, there are more red-coats on the way up now to punish those who have done

wrong than there are *Metis* and Indians in the North-West territories ten times over. And there are a thousand times as many again to come should the first lot not prove enough, which of course they will. You nor any one else, neither White man, *Metis*, or Indian, has ever heard a Mounted Policeman yet say what was not absolutely true or foretell what has not come to pass. So I say this to you, Michelle, that Louis Riel and those who side with him shall hang yet on the gallows-tree unless they come into the barracks and lay down their arms. Now, you know me of old, and how I as well as all my kind, the Police, have been a friend to the Breeds and Indians. So take my advice and keep right on your way to Fort Qu'Appelle, and swear to be true to the Government, and you will have done the best day's work for yourself that you ever did in your life. Good-bye!"

But while the Sergeant had been speaking to Michelle the Breed, the Indians had evidently made up their minds to seize upon such plunder as would best suit them before their allies, the *Metis*, might possibly forestall them. Horses, now that the thaw could not be long delayed, were badly wanted, and Terence O'Donohue's wiry cayuse had appealed to them. They,

therefore, had gathered round the Irishman, and given him to understand that he must hand the docile-looking Laurier over to them. The owner, with a show of reluctance that stamped him as a born actor, proceeded to unhitch his horse. This done, he uncoiled a head-rope, so that he who chose might lead it away—if he could. He left it standing on the trail, and proceeded unconcernedly to look for something in his tiny sleigh.

Two of the Indians, still sitting on their horses, simultaneously came alongside to seize upon Laurier when the unexpected occurred. The cayuse with the rounded nose seemed suddenly to have gone mad. With something that resembled a squeal of scorn it wheeled and lashed out with its hind legs, giving White-Feather's mount such a furious kick in the ribs that the surprised and outraged recipient shot round in an agony of fear, and unhorsed its rider. As White-Feather had been in the act of bending over to catch hold of the halter-shank, he was kicked violently on the left leg at the same moment. The Indian fell heavily to earth, and rolled in agony on the snow. But Laurier had not finished. He actually rushed upon and bit at the head of the second Indian's pony, with the result

that, to avoid being also thrown, the nimble Beaver's-Tail slid expeditiously to the ground, in his haste dropping his rifle in the snow.

That same moment Jack saw, and seized, his opportunity. He had caught and held Piper in the sleigh, lest by his antipathy to anything in the shape of a Breed or a Redskin he should precipitate trouble; but now Jack felt that it would be a sin to detain the dog any longer.

Piper made straight for the heels of the nearest Breed's horse, which happened to be Michelle's, and in another moment that ungrateful braggart's steed was floundering in deep snow off the trail, its rider holding on to the horn of his saddle and vainly endeavouring to right himself. That same moment Terence O'Donohue, who, strangely enough, had been permitted to burrow in his little box-sleigh, straightened his back, and with the rifle that was in his hands shot the horse of the second Breed. The rider came heavily to earth, where he lay. Before the third Breed could realise that in another minute his party would be practically *hors de combat*, Sergeant Pollock's rifle was at his head, and he was forced to throw his hands into the air to escape being shot.

As for Jack, he was about to cover the third Indian with his rifle, when that gentleman, who was close to him, lifted his and fired. But Man-of-Might was too near him, and too sure of his aim, to take any particular pains, with the result that he only succeeded in shooting a hole through Jack's fur cap. It was, indeed, a close call. Next moment Jack had retaliated, and the Indian tumbled from his horse with a broken arm. He also had made a narrow escape. In the meantime, the nimble Beaver's-Tail had succeeded in picking up his dropped rifle, when Terence O'Donohue came behind him and gave him such a tap on the head with the butt end of his that the Indian collapsed on the snow.

In less than two minutes the rout of these Breeds and Indians was as complete as any rout could possibly be. Jack had made a dash for Michelle, the ungrateful and insolent Breed, and, clubbing his rifle, had struck him over the head with it, bringing him to earth. He was still in a dazed and stupid condition when he was bound hand and leg to an Indian rejoicing in the name of Goose-Quill. While all this was going on Piper had also been fully employed, and, undoubtedly, much of the success of their really extraordinary

triumph over the enemy was attributable to him. He had sneaked with praiseworthy celerity from one Indian's horse to another, in each case nipping a hind leg so that the harassed equine naturally plunged violently, with the result that its rider could do nothing but endeavour to stick on its back. But the matter generally ended with the Breed or the Indian sliding all of a heap to the ground, in which case he was promptly clubbed on the head by the now heartened and victorious enemy. Two of the horses belonging to the marauders, finding themselves at liberty, trotted off along the trail in the direction of Qu'Appelle.

"And now," said Sergeant Pollock, "as these chaps can't be trusted with firearms, and they are of no use to us, we shall smash them up."

This was promptly done. Their cartridges, powder flasks, and knives were also confiscated. The Breeds and Indians looked on in silence. They were, literally and figuratively, too sick to speak.

"The question now is, What is to be done with the prisoners?" said Sergeant Pollock. "We can't take them on with us, and we can hardly leave them here. Besides, this

chap with the gun-shot wound in his arm wants seeing to; but I daresay I can give him first aid."

And without more ado, the Police Sergeant saw to the injury in question with a deftness and readiness of resource that spoke of no mean training. It was very obvious it was not the first time he had done the same thing. The party was wondering how it could deal with the difficulty that confronted them, when Piper suddenly gave tongue and gazed excitedly along the trail by which they had come. The sight that met their eyes was indeed an inspiriting one. Coming along that trail at a good pace were three Police cutters, in each of which sat two men!

"Hooray!" cried Terence O'Donohue, and threw up his hat.

"Well, that's lucky, but they would have come too late if fortune hadn't been kind to us," observed Sergeant Pollock quietly. "But better late than never. I expect it's a patrol out from Qu'Appelle. They've got wind of what happened last night, and have followed up our tracks to find out what's what. They have done well when one comes to think of it."

And, indeed, these Mounted Policemen had

done well. News had come to the post by the Indian runner from Piapot's Reserve that there was trouble somewhere on the trail, and they had started out that same instant. With very natural apprehension they had approached the scene of the previous night's fight, where the dwelling-house was still burning, and there they had ample evidence of what must have occurred. They surprised a couple of Breeds and an Indian who were poking about the deserted outbuildings, and these they sent back to the fort under escort. The six remaining Policemen, as has been said, then hurried along the trail in order to find out what had happened to Sergeant Pollock's party. Great indeed was their relief and sense of satisfaction when they heard the decidedly brief and matter-of-fact account of the two fights from the lips of Sergeant Pollock.

"Well, I think that you are to be heartily congratulated on the way in which you have pulled through," said the officer in charge of the relief party. "I was beginning to think something must have happened to you, though I knew, Sergeant Pollock, that you could very well be trusted to give a good account of yourself. I've come out a good deal farther from the post than I really had any

right to, but if I turn back right now, I daresay I'll be able to stop them coming out to look for us. You can push on if you want to. We'll take charge of the prisoners and their belongings. We met two of their horses on the trail, and will pick them up as we go back."

In a few minutes more they had thanked and once more said good-bye to the party from Fort Qu'Appelle. Laurier, after its recent outbreak, had evidently either gone to sleep or relapsed into a normal condition of melancholy, for when its proud owner shouted to it, as was his wont, there was no response. Catching sight of the disappearing dogs, however, it started off at a feverish gallop, which threatened disaster. It had, indeed, been an extraordinary adventure, coming as it had done so quickly on the top of that of the previous night.

"I really hope we shan't have any more adventures for the next twenty-four hours," said Sergeant Pollock to his companions. "We've had quite enough excitement to last us for some considerable time. Terence O'Donohue, that horse of yours is a beauty, and worth his weight in gold. He will never want for a good feed of oats as long

as I can lay my hands on one. And, Jack, I believe you've had that dog of yours specially trained for this campaign. Now, don't tell me that you haven't! I won't believe a word of it. Let's push on, comrades!"

CHAPTER IX

A STRANGE MEETING

SEVERAL days later, at the close of a long day's journeying, Sergeant Pollock's party found itself on a little-used trail just outside Battleford. There had been no time lost. So far they had escaped coming in contact with the enemy by avoiding the main route, and working their way from one farm to another by connecting trails. They had crossed Long Lake, and in the neighbourhood of Saskatoon fell in with a patrol of Mounted Police, who relieved them of their dispatches for Prince Albert. It was obvious that troops could not be hurried up in time to save the situation at the latter place. The Breeds and Indians were concentrating on it, and Colonel Irvine would be obliged to remain at the fort to which the settlers and their families had flocked, in order to protect them. They were badly off for rations, and what they had would not

last long. But it would be little use surrendering to the enemy on that account. Riel and his "Provisional Government" had no commissariat department, save what it succeeded in looting, so it was not likely they were going to feed prisoners.

It was at this point that Terence O'Donohue elected to go on with Sergeant Pollock and Jack to Battleford and Fort Pitt. He was now relieved of the responsibility of having to proceed to Prince Albert. He felt that he had, to a certain extent, been deprived of the stirring time which he had looked forward to, and must needs make up for it somehow. His horse Laurier, to the no little astonishment of the Sergeant and Jack, had actually picked up in condition, and this on a trip that would certainly have killed any average horse of reputable character.

"I don't like the look of things at all, Jack," said Sergeant Pollock, as they halted on the edge of a thicket of wolf-willow and saskatoon bushes some three miles or so from the fort and village. "It's queer we have neither met with nor seen any Police or even Breeds or Indians lately. I hope nothing has happened to the garrison. Nearly all the settlers with their families must have gone into laager there, judging by the number of deserted

places we've struck, and it is also fairly certain that the rebels must be investing the post. They have in all probability seized the village. This must be so, seeing we have met so few of them. I think we'd better put up at that old corral and shed over there. I fancy I can see a small shack peeping round the corner of that stack of hay."

"And then we can go out after it gets dark and reconnoitre," suggested Jack.

"Quite so! You see, we've got to get a message through to the garrison. If it is the case that the village of Battleford is seized, and the fort is surrounded by the enemy, then it will be dangerous and ticklish work getting in touch with them."

"There is nothing to prevent me getting through to the fort," said Jack. "I am dressed much the same as any Breed. With my fur collar up, and only my eyes showing like every one else this weather, no one will suspect me. Besides, as I have said, I can talk the patois and Cree if necessary."

"Well, we'll see. Of course we don't know what's what in Battleford yet. And, by the way, I think it is rather risky camping as close as we are doing to the village. Doubtless the enemy imagine that all the settlers are

already in laager. Anyhow, we've got to take risks in order to be able to do anything. We can do nothing without doing so."

"And shure, what's the matter wid me?" asked Terence. "I'll undertake to get through to the fort."

"I fancy you are about as well known as I am, Terence," said the Sergeant. "I've no doubt you'd have a plucky shot at it, but you might meet with some one who would recognise you. No, we can't take any such risks. When it gets dark, Jack, you can have a try. No one knows you up here, and you can talk to them like a native. Let's get into that shed and feed the dogs, and see to some supper for ourselves. Go ahead, Terence."

In a few minutes more they had taken possession of the ramshackle place which evidently had been left in a hurry by its owners. There was ample proof that since then the enemy had paid it a visit, for everything was in the greatest confusion. Anything of value had, of course, been taken.

Fortunately, they had with them all they required in the way of food and cooking appliances, so in a comparatively short time a good meal was prepared. They took the usual precaution of boarding up the windows.

The fire they made in the wide chimney could hardly be seen from the trail. Upon the whole, it was not a bad place in which to camp. But first, they saw to Laurier and the dogs ; for as soon as their mission was accomplished they would have to leave there without a moment's delay and push on again. If they remained till daylight they would most certainly be surprised, and in all likelihood their lives would be forfeit. The rebels, in most cases, were murdering all those who fell into their hands.

The meal over, the Sergeant went to the door and looked out. "It's a lovely night," he said, "and there's a half-moon. Hello! just listen for a minute! And look! There must be a fire of some sort in the village."

They went outside and looked and listened. There was much both to see and to hear. The wonder was they had not heard it before. They now understood why Piper had been so restless and importunate since they had come there. At first they had endeavoured to ascertain the cause of it, but could see and hear nothing. Even the sleigh dogs had seemed perturbed, listening and whimpering and throwing their heads up as if scenting something unusual. But of course the humans

knew that these dogs, with their highly-developed senses, could detect presences which it was far beyond their power to do. But now borne upon the breath of air that was stirring they could hear the hollow monotones of Indian drums. And not only orthodox drums, but the harsh, metallic clangour of tin cans and kettles. Human voices could also be heard, but they sounded more like those of brutes. Weird, imitative barks and yelps were interspersed in that discordant powwow.

"The Indians have gone on the warpath and are having a high old time," observed the Sergeant. "I wouldn't wonder if they are looting the Hudson Bay Store and setting fire to some of the buildings. Now will be the time to try and get through to the fort, seeing they have gone on the loose. Terence, you stop here and look after things. Jack, here's a packet for the officer commanding the post. Come with me and we'll see if it's possible to get through. I think I can remember the way."

"Shall I take my gun, Sergeant?" asked Jack.

"No, I fear it would be little use to you in the event of a discovery. You can take your six-shooter under your fur coat if you like.

But you mustn't use it unless some one is about to shoot you. You must try and get into the village without being seen, and then sneak over to the fort. You may have to pass Breeds and Indians and have to speak to them, but you have enough wit to do that without letting them suspect your identity. I'll stand by in case of accidents. I wouldn't ask you to do this, only I was once stationed in Battleford, and every Breed and Indian in the neighbourhood knows me. No one knows you."

"I'll get through to the fort if it's possible at all, Sergeant Pollock," said Jack. "Indeed I don't see that there need be any difficulty in doing that. The only thing I'll have to guard against will be the Police sentries. But I can creep up and sing out to them."

Now that Jack was face to face with what might prove to be a very dangerous and difficult task, the prospect did not daunt him particularly. Indeed he was eager to set out and fulfil his mission. It was something that appealed to him. It would put him on his mettle; it would be a good test of nerve and presence of mind. He felt that he would be equal to the occasion. The adventure of the whole affair was after his own heart. He

quite understood the futility of the Sergeant trying to get through the rebel lines. He was well known there, and if he was stopped and recognised their mission would end in disaster. It did not only mean death to himself, and in all probability those who composed the party, but it meant that the beleaguered fort, with its garrison and numerous refugees, would be without any definite news or instructions regarding the relief force. This might have serious and far-reaching consequences. Jack knew only too well that the Sergeant would never have asked him to run the blockade if there had been the slightest prospect of him getting through unrecognised himself. There was no braver man in the North-West Mounted Police, and no one who had done pluckier things than Sergeant Pollock. But he, Jack, would get through, and he rejoiced in the opportunity—the privilege—of being the chosen medium to convey such important dispatches to the beleaguered garrison.

In a few minutes more Jack had received his instructions and got ready. Sergeant Pollock and he left the little homestead and skirted a thicket of saskatoon bushes.

"There's lots of light, Jack," remarked

Sergeant Pollock, "almost too much, in fact; but when one has got to go through with a piece of work like this it is always best to do it boldly. You'll have to exercise caution, however, in getting through the crowd in the village. I think it will be safer for you to approach it from the river side. To the south and east you can be sure they keep a sharp look-out. Here there are so many people moving about that they don't apprehend danger, so will be less likely to take notice of your movements."

Within half an hour they were on the outskirts of the irregular and straggling village of Battleford—it has shot up into an important and busy town within the last few years—and two or three isolated log-houses loomed up in front of them. Even in the main street—the only one, of course—the houses—if one could dignify them by describing them as such—stood mostly apart, and were surrounded by dog-leg and primitive fences. Here and there, more particularly on the banks of the great frozen Saskatchewan River, were dug-outs where the *Metis* and even some of the Europeans lived. Indeed at one time Battleford was practically a Half-Breed village.

About a mile or so away, on the top of the

high bank overlooking the Saskatchewan, the Police Post could be dimly seen through the soft haze of moonlight. But there was more than the chaste light of the moon illumining the scene. Not far from the Hudson Bay Company's Store a long and low log-house was burning fiercely. Round it a weird crowd of drunken and excited Half-Breeds and Indians were dancing to barbaric and discordant strains. Some one was actually fiddling, and Jack could distinguish the Red River jig. Breeds and Indians were mixed up indiscriminately. They had joined forces against the white man. Men and women in various garbs, from blanket suits to buffalo coats, were moving about in all directions. It was obviously a time of unlimited looting and excesses.

"And this is how they set about getting their so-called rights!" said Sergeant Pollock bitterly. "Now, Jack, I'd advise you to make over to the village in the rear of these outhouses. Don't get prowling around by back ways. You'll attract far less attention by sauntering boldly along the main street. I shall remain here for a couple of hours or so. If you don't return by that time, I'll presume you have been obliged to make back to our camp by another route. I'd

advise you to try and reach the barracks by the hay corral. There's a little watercourse quite close to it. You might sneak up it. And be sure and sing out 'Friend' when the sentry challenges you. In fact, I'd advise you to sing out to him first. He might be a nervous man, you see, and forget to challenge you before firing. Now, au revoir, and good luck!"

He gave Jack's hand a hearty shake, and in another minute the boy was walking easily, and apparently unconcernedly, towards what looked like a species of large barn or livery stable. But it could hardly be said that Jack was unconcerned. To do him justice, it was not so much the thought of what the consequences would be to himself if by any chance his identity was discovered, or if he was fired upon by those in the fort in mistake for a spying Breed or Indian, but the knowledge that any such happening might mean the failure of the all-important mission with which he was entrusted. If he was wounded or killed by the enemy it might lead to the capture and execution of his companions.

He reached the shadow of the barn and skirted the building, then he stepped boldly out on to the primitive side-walks. In another

minute he was passing and being passed by a motley crowd of Breeds and Indians. It was obvious to him that some of them were in liquor. He hardly dared to look at them lest they should recognise him, or, seeing that he was a stranger, question him. But in the latter case he would be ready with an answer.

Once or twice a Breed or Indian would lurch against him, but Jack had always a good-natured remark or a laugh ready. In all likelihood the idea of an enemy walking about amongst them with dispatches in his pocket for the beleaguered fort never for a moment suggested itself, and would have been at once dismissed as fantastic if it had. But of course Jack could hardly be expected to view the matter in that light.

It was quite a long street, if such it could be called, for, of course, in places there were great gaps between the houses—land that seemed to belong to no one—where Red River carts and prairie-schooners—waggons with hoods—were scattered about anywhere and anyhow. Even in the middle of the road itself, where doubtless cattle and horses grazed in summer time, there were camp-fires and people engaged in cooking and other domestic duties. There was one group which evidently carried on a butcher-

ing business. Even although the cattle killed were not paid for, and never would be, it was doubtful whether the self-constituted retailers of the same made any ready cash out of them. Barter seemed the order of the day, and most of the goods had been looted from the stores. Feasting and rude merry-making was to be witnessed on every hand.

Still here and there were little groups and individuals who seemed sober and business-like enough. They were mostly dressed in blanket suits or furs, and wore heavy caps of badger or unplucked beaver. All, of course, wore moccasins. They were such a lot as one might have seen gathered together when a great buffalo hunt was to be the order of the day. Most of them had been buffalo hunters or slaughterers, for they invariably killed more than they could dispose of. They carried firearms, in case the besieged men in the fort should take it into their heads to sally out and make an attack upon them. But that would have been foolish under the circumstances. Nothing would have been gained, and many valuable lives would have been lost by doing so. The odds were ten to one against them. Besides, every day's delay told against the enemy's chances of ultimate success. And

such were the *Metis* who thought to run a Government of their own !

Two or three times Jack was addressed and delayed by Indians or Breeds, who either mistook him for some one else, or spoke to him merely for the sake of talking. But Jack always found a ready excuse and hurried on.

When he came to the last house in the village and nearest to the fort, he passed behind it in the shadow of some outbuildings. He saw before him the broken watercourse or hollow of which Sergeant Pollock had told him. He was about to cross over the sixty yards or so of open ground that separated him from it, when he was hailed by a voice the volume of which made him start. The owner of it he, somehow, could not see.

" Hello thar ! " cried the voice. " Who are you, and what you want ? "

" Friend," cried Jack, taken by surprise, and forgetting that he could not yet be anywhere near the sentries of the Mounted Police.

There was a species of dry cackle that was doubtless meant for a laugh, and Jack's invisible interrogator again said—

" Bah ! What foolishness it is you talk. You are of the British. I know. *Bien !* "

" Well, if you knew, why did you ask ? "

said Jack, who now, realising the mistake he had made, knew there was nothing for it but to try and pass the matter off as a joke. "Did you take me for a Mounted Policeman poking about here? But I can't see you. Where are you?"

"Ha, ha! coquin, villain! Why should you want for to see me? You must think Pepin Quesnelle is a fool, like so many of your people. And so you are one of the enemy, and trying to get through to the fort!"

"You are a funny man!" said Jack, whose heart, albeit he spoke so jauntily, seemed to be somewhere in his moccasins. "Is it likely that if I were one of the enemy I'd be coming out of your camp? Ah, now I see you! Hello!"

Jack's ejaculation was one of genuine astonishment—for the moment it almost expressed something akin to superstitious fear. The owner of the voice had stepped from the deep shadow into the moonlight, and Jack saw before him the oddest creature he had ever looked upon in his life. He was a dwarf, little more than three feet in height, with very short legs, but with a large body and powerful arms. He wore a long scarf wound round his waist. He carried a long stick resembling an alpenstock. Jack could see his face distinctly

as the moonlight fell full upon it, and it came somewhat in the nature of a surprise to the wondering lad to note that it was quite a good and even distinguished one. The eyes of the manikin were large and expressive, and, although kindly enough, still held a hint of sardonic humour. Indeed Pepin Quesnelle, as he called himself, seemed, as he indeed was, a contradiction. He wore a moustache and slight pointed beard. But the oddest feature of the situation was, that what Jack had at first taken to be a huge dog turned out to be a black bear. It kept close to its master, and sat down on its hind-quarters in the snow as if taking an intelligent interest in the proceedings. Jack's head was in a whirl at meeting with such an extraordinary pair just when he had been congratulating himself upon the fact that he had successfully left behind the mad crew in the village. But there were the dispatches—was he going to allow a dwarf to upset his plans at the eleventh hour? And there was the bear, which seemed on such good terms with its master. If he had to use forcible means to quieten this dwarf, how was he going to get rid of the bear?

"Aha, *mon ami*!" exclaimed the dwarf as he came towards Jack. "And so you were

trying to get through to the fort, were you!" He scrutinised the boy's face keenly. "Ah no, do not think of that," he continued, as if interpreting Jack's thoughts. "It would be foolishness, believe me. I could rap you over the head so with this stick before you could draw your gun, and there would be also Antoine here to reckon with. Do not try to be clever."

"I shan't try to," said Jack, smiling, despite the serious nature of the situation. Still, there was something in the dwarf's face and manner, apart from his words, that gave him hope. This manikin might not even be a rebel at heart although living with the rebels. It was an impossible situation. He must say or do something. He must get through with his dispatches, but in order to do so he must first get rid of his strange questioner.

Pepin Quesnelle must indeed have been reading the lad's thoughts on his face, for again he said—

"Bah! Do you think I am like to these fools over there who do not know what they want? But you are very young, and have much to learn, though I would say you are not altogether bad boy. I know why it is you are here. You would like to go through to

the fort, and you are carrying message for it. Where are the Police whom you came with? But no, I will not ask—it is not what you would call it, playing the game; Pepin Quesnelle always plays the game. I have told these fools what the end of it all will be, but they will not listen. That fool Louis Riel—who, however, is not altogether a fool—and Gabriel Dumont, and Lepine, and Garnot, and some others have put mad thoughts into their heads, and so they will go on until they hang themselves. Some of them are akin to me, and so I will not say I am not sorry, but at the same time I will not help them. I, Pepin Quesnelle, have told them so."

"Now that I think of it, I believe I have heard of you, Pepin Quesnelle," said Jack. He remembered how he had heard of the odd character, whose name was surely Quesnelle, who pursued the trade of a saddler or mender of harness in Battleford. He was considered a grim and somewhat sardonic character, because he never hesitated to say exactly what he thought, and he generally knew more than those who, doubtless, only imperfectly understood him.

"Bah! You only think you have heard of me!" exclaimed the dwarf. "You are surely a

poor sort of boy to only think you know things. From where have you come that you have not heard of Pepin Quesnelle ? "

" I come from south of the Red River, Mr. Quesnelle," said Jack. " But still I have heard the men of the North-West Mounted Police speak of the saddler who mends their harness in Battleford. Yes, they said that no one in the North-West Territories could make or mend harness like you, and they also said that they looked upon you as one of their best friends."

" Ah, that is so ! " exclaimed the dwarf, evidently pleased. " We are good friends, the Police and I. But do not call me Mister Quesnelle. I am Pepin—Pepin Quesnelle ; there can only be one Pepin Quesnelle in the country ; the Mister is only for the wood-and-water joey—the man from an English college with letters of the alphabet after his name who draws wood and water for the village people."

It was very obvious to Jack that this consequential little dwarf was a character in his way. He must humour him if he was to be allowed to get through to the barracks. Jack realised that it was no use trying to beat about the bush and attempting to deceive him. It was a waste of time to go on that tack

with Pepin Quesnelle. His only sure course was to tell him the truth. He evidently did not share the revolutionary ideas of the rebels—in fact, now that he came to think of it, he had heard about this odd creature, and what he had been told was to his credit, albeit he had also a reputation for having a tongue that was sharp and merciless to those who incurred his displeasure.

"Then I am glad that I have met you, Pepin Quesnelle," said Jack. "I know that you have done your utmost to prevent the *Metis* from rising, and I dare say that if they were not afraid of you they would have attempted to do you injury——"

"What! Idiots such as these!" snorted Pepin. "Bah! I could flog them all with this stick if I wanted to. But they are not worth it. *Voilà!*"

"I spoke without thinking, Pepin," continued Jack, "and I will answer your questions. Yes, I am trying to get through to the fort. I have had a long journey, and the news that I carry is—as I am sure you who understand things cannot be surprised to hear—that the soldiers are already on their way up here from down East, and their numbers are more than ten times that of the *Metis*. It is betraying

no trust on my part to tell you that. Indeed I only wish I could tell it to the *Metis*. It would save them many lives and much trouble in the time to come."

"Bah! what would be the use—to tell those idiots! They would not believe, and if their leaders caught you, they would put you to death simply because your news might weaken their power over them. But I will ask no more questions. You can tell me what you like if you think you can trust me. But I would advise that you waste no more time in talking now. I will show you the way to the fort, and I will, moreover, tell to you how to get past the sentries of the *Metis*. Do you remain in the fort when you get there?"

"No, I must come straight back, Pepin. I have two friends waiting for me on the other side of the village—at a little farm alongside a wood over that way"—Jack pointed in the direction.

"Ah! I know!" Pepin nodded. "But I think it would be better for you to push on now. I myself, Pepin Quesnelle, will show you how to go, otherwise you would be sure to run into the hands of those of the *Metis* who watch the fort. I will wait for you here

when you come back, so as to be near if you should get into trouble with those crimson idiots. You say you will not wait! No? Then that is all right. Come on, Antoine," turning to the bear and giving it a poke with his long stick that made Jack apprehensive of reprisals for the moment. "Go on—into the creek with you, you idiot, and show to us the way. The *Metis* will not stay to inquire of Antoine what he wants, and we will follow up close behind. Come on!"

CHAPTER X

BATTLEFORD BESIEGED

It was the oddest adventure of its kind Jack had ever taken part in—to be walking alongside that eccentric dwarf and with a bear leading the way. Indeed it flashed across the boy's mind as he looked at them that Pepin Quesnelle, with his pigmy legs and large body and head, resembled some uncanny being from another world, and the bear that shuffled on ahead, now and again looking over its shoulder to see if they were coming, some grim familiar in attendance. The air of knowingness and understanding with which the great brute regarded them inspired Jack with an odd sense of fear. It looked big enough and, beyond doubt, was strong enough to kill half a dozen such men as its master at a romp, but there could be no doubting the fact that it was completely under the thumb of Pepin, the

manikin with the stick. It certainly was an exemplification of the triumph of mind over matter.

Pepin Quesnelle looked around keenly, then, giving Antoine a poke with his stick in the ribs, pointed to the depression that led up in the direction of the fort. It might have been, for all Jack knew, the dry bed of a creek or *coulée* in summer, but now it was little better than a wide, snow-lined ditch, not much below the level of the bank or bench,[1] whichever one might choose to call it.

The dwarf had mentioned to Jack that he must not speak. The noises of riot in the village were left behind, and died away, and the lad could distinctly hear the deep breathing of the great ungainly animal as it shambled along leisurely in front. But a bear is not really ungainly—in point of fact no animal ever is—for, of course, we can only judge things by our self-created standard, and without, perhaps, a full understanding of the lines upon which the greatest designer in the world—Mother Nature—works. It may be that there are created things which have a long way to go before the finishing touch is given to them—if, indeed, man ever has seen a perfected

[1] A plateau.

touch, and we leave humanity itself out of the thesis. But all the same, there is nothing in all God's world—unless it is the outward expression of evil—that can be called ugly if we would only understand.

Jack was obliged to somewhat curtail his steps, as the short legs of Pepin, though they really moved backwards and forwards with remarkable rapidity, could not cover much ground. It interested and not a little amused the boy to note the air of importance and vigour that the dwarf assumed. He occasionally swung his stout stick about after the manner of a drum-major, threw out his chest, and glanced around with the air of one who is in supreme command of all he looks upon. Jack could see, however, that there was nothing that escaped his attention. His great dark eyes seemed to pierce the misty and dim distance, and at times the lad noticed that he stopped short and put his head on one side as if to listen. Then with something that resembled an impish chuckle he would suddenly stir Antoine up behind with his stick if that sagacious animal happened to exhibit symptoms of absent-mindedness.

More than once it occurred to Jack that he was surely doing something that was very

injudicious indeed to be trusting himself to the guidance of one who evidently belonged to the *Metis*—the enemy. True, he vaguely remembered having heard something about Pepin Quesnelle, and that, so far as he could recollect, was to his credit. But at that time the subject of a strange and unfamiliar personage some hundreds of miles away had no particular interest for Jack, and, therefore, he might be making a mistake after all in imagining that what he had heard was favourable. Besides, there were so many odd characters scattered over the country. No presentiment had been his at the time that he would ever come across Pepin Quesnelle. In that comparatively lonely land news travelled very slowly indeed—unless, perhaps, it was of a sanguinary nature, and then it was wonderful how quickly such news seemed to travel. For instance, within two days of the massacre by the *Metis* at Frog Lake, when eight Whites were murdered in church by Riel's followers, the news was all over a country much larger than Europe in less than two days, and that without the aid of either rail or telegraph wires!

Suddenly, just when Jack was wondering how much farther they had to go before they reached the fort, his guide lifted his stick as if

to enjoin silence and caution. The boy noted that the large eyes of the little man fairly shone as with the conception of some happy but unholy thought.

"Look!" he whispered to Jack, and tapped him on the arm with his stick. Then he pointed up the *coulée*.

But although Jack's eyes were quite normal and good, he could not make out anything in particular. He noted, however, that Antoine the bear had stopped and was sniffing the air.

"Bah!" exclaimed the dwarf under his breath, "can you not see—over there—sitting with their backs to us—two of the *Metis*? *Mon Dieu*, if they know not of Antoine or of me—and maybe so they come from far away and have forgotten when they have heard of Pepin Quesnelle—I will give them—what you call it—a high old time. Perhaps they know not Antoine, and Antoine will make them—what you call it—cut their stick, skeedaddle. But you will have to hurry up—indeed I will go with you and see to it that the Shermoganish—Police—do not bore a hole in your thick skull. *Allons!*"

Jack looked at the dwarf. He had suddenly become the living embodiment of mischief. His dark eyes fairly shone with unholy in-

spiration. That he meditated surprise of an unpleasant nature for these two patient Breeds at their lonely posts was obvious. He seized Jack by the arm, and the two, under cover of a rib of snow, crept up behind the unsuspecting guard. The latter had placed their rifles against the cut-bank and were slowly moving up and down, grasping their mitted hands in front of them, and stamping their moccasined feet in the snow as if to keep them warm. They were evidently quite unconscious, and by no means apprehensive, of being intruded upon. They were units of a circle of sentries round the beleaguered fort, and it was not likely that if the besieged ones did meditate trying to escape—and that surely would be a mad thing to attempt—they would do so on the side nearest the village where the bulk of the *Metis* were. No, it was almost unnecessary their being there at all. It was rather unfortunate their being on duty while their friends were having a high old time in Battleford. Moreover, it was a lonely place in which to do sentry-go—quite as primitive and wild as their homes, which they had left about a fortnight before on the shores of the Red Deer Lake where the bears frequently came down in the night and tried to get at

the calves, which they were obliged to keep indoors on account of these fierce and cunning marauders. They could not understand why they had not been relieved at their posts. Their time was more than up, and they were becoming tired and hungry, to say the least of it. This condition of affairs had also affected their nerves, and they had begun to speculate as to what exactly the flare in the sky, and the occasional notes of excitement which every now and again were carried up to them by some stray breath of wind, might mean, when something occurred that till this day—if they survived the rebellion—they doubtless speak of with a sense of wonder and terror.

The two sentries had been standing together, deliberating as to whether or not they were justified in going down to the village and calling their superior's attention to the fact that they had evidently been overlooked, when a large, dark object suddenly whirled in air between them on a level with their heads.

It was Pepin Quesnelle's fur cap, and he had called Antoine's attention to it before throwing the same, as any one might excite the sporting nature of a dog in the same way. To the two Breeds, who had imagined they were quite alone in the *coulée*, the apparition

of that furry thing whirling through the air was startling and inexplicable enough, but what followed immediately afterwards was a thousand times more so.

Pepin's bear Antoine, like most animals when bent on business, always went in a straight line, regardless of objects that might be in his path. The sentries, which were the objects in this case, were nothing in particular to him—it was the thing that he happened to be after which mattered most. So when the Breeds partly turned to see where the furry object came from, they saw an enormous bear —by far and away the biggest bear either of them had ever seen—coming right for them. Horror and dismay for the moment riveted them to the spot. They could not have moved an inch or lifted a little finger to save their lives. In another moment the bear had charged down upon them—it really forced its giant bulk between them—and they both went down like a couple of ninepins. But Jean Le Bas and Paul St. Croix were up in another minute —they knew that the bear could only tackle and maul one of them at a time, and each was filled with the natural hope that the one so honoured would be the other Breed. They had no time to pick up their guns—they were

much too flurried to do that, old hunters as they were, and, besides, how did they know they would have time to do it? They simply picked themselves up and fled as fast as their moccasined feet would carry them. It was a record sprint, that fifty yards, until they came to the almost perpendicular opposite cut-bank. Unfortunately, they both at the same time tried to climb up at that particular spot which seemed to present the fewest obstacles, with the result that they crowded each other, and, when half-way up, one of them, with a touching disregard for the safety of the other, made a grab at his comrade's leg as it dangled temptingly before his nose. But it did not at all prove an aid in his time of trouble.

As the two came down head over heels to the frozen bed of the creek again, Jack thought they must inevitably be killed, but, fortunately for them, they fell on a rib of snow, and that broke their fall. These two Breeds, it must be remembered, had more of savage man in their composition than we of Anglo-Celtic race, so could stand a good deal of killing. Somewhat to Jack's surprise they were up again in another minute and off, this time in another direction.

As for Antoine the bear, he had retrieved Pepin's hat, and, catching sight of the two

Breeds as they made off, he came to the conclusion that the whole affair had been arranged specially for his entertainment, and that he was expected to take a hand in it. In another moment, and encouraged by a chuckle from his master, Antoine was after them again. As a bear is in reality one of the swiftest animals that goes on four legs, despite his lumbering appearance, he had overtaken Paul St. Croix before one could say Jack Robinson. Antoine with his great snout pushed him forward on his face, and rolled him in the snow. The Half-Breed, imagining his last hour had come, and without sufficient breath to cry for help, lay gasping and struggling in a futile and helpless fashion.

Next moment Antoine had turned his attention to Jean Le Bas. That stalwart Breed he simply caught by the thick sash round his waist, and, lifting him off his feet, shook him as a terrier might a rat. Then Antoine flung him yards away over his shoulder. The two Breeds picked themselves up again, and resumed their flight. Never in their lives had either of them experienced such a doing.

As for Antoine, he had enjoyed the little frolic immensely, and trotted back to his master and Jack. The latter had at first

naturally imagined that when the bear had made for the sentries it did so in order to rend them to pieces. He was encouraged in this idea by the singular conduct of the dwarf, who danced about with his pigmy legs in a grim ecstasy of delight. He flourished his stick over his head, and would doubtless have burst into a warcry, only that he naturally did not wish to raise an alarm. Antoine's victory was, undoubtedly, his victory. When the Breeds succeeded in getting out of the creek bottom and began to run, Pepin put his hands to his mouth and gave vent to a roar that would have done credit to a full-grown lion. This more than likely considerably accelerated the pace of the fugitives. If those two Breeds reached the main camp separately, and at different points, each one doubtless told how he had been set upon by a great bear, and how the other one had been killed. But they would also have to explain how it was they did not shoot the bear when they were supposed to be carrying rifles, and that would be a somewhat difficult point to clear up.

"I think, Pepin, it would be as well if we hurried up," said Jack. "When those two fellows get to the camp, they may come back with their friends to look for the bear."

"*Ah non!*" said the dwarf. "Their friends may come maybe, but those two men, *non*—nevaire again. *Mais* you are right that we should hurry up. Come on. What is it you will think of Antoine now?" The dwarf was still chuckling to himself.

"He is a hustler,[1] and no mistake," replied Jack. "I thought he was going to kill them both."

"And if he had, Saskatchewan would have been well rid of two such chuckle-heads. Ah, Antoine, you funny one, it is not every day you get a game like it that." And, to the no little apprehension of the boy, the dwarf turned to the bear and executed a species of war-dance in front of it. The huge animal promptly stood up on its hind legs and assumed the defensive. It watched its master with its small, truculent eyes, as might a prize boxer who was not sure what move the enemy was going to be up to next.

"Ah, villain," cried the dwarf, "I have no time to have a round with you now. Another time will do. *Marchez!*"

He gave the great creature an adroit poke in the ribs with his stick, which promptly brought it to all-fours again, then pointing up

[1] Busy one.

the creek, Antoine took the hint and shambled off. Pepin picked up the rifles which the sentries had left, and threw them away again about a hundred yards farther on.

A few minutes more and the creek became shallower. Then it seemed to open out, and they caught sight of the barrack buildings looming up dimly in the distance. Pepin called in Antoine, put his fingers to his lips, and gave a peculiar whistle. Next moment two heads peeped over a bank of snow on their right that Jack had hardly noticed, blending as it did with the grey distance, and a voice cried, "Halt, who goes there?" At the same moment Jack also noticed that a couple of rifle barrels showed over the snow bank, and were pointed straight at their heads.

"It is I—a friend—Pepin Quesnelle," cried the dwarf. "And I have with me another friend. What ho! you chuckle-heads, can you not see who it is? Is there another man like Pepin Quesnelle in this country?"

"Bedad no, an' ye've said it, me boy! Advance, friend Pepin, all's well," said a hearty voice, and in another minute Pepin and Jack were facing two fur-coated Mounted Policemen who were evidently doing sentry duty.

"Well, Pepin Quesnelle, we're always glad to see you, you know," said the second Mounted Policeman. "What can we do for you? Would you like to see the Officer Commanding, or any one else?"

But there was no time to spare under the circumstances. The two alarmed Breed sentries were doubtless by this time back in camp, and if they delayed any longer it would be impossible to make Battleford again without being seen. Precedent could not be followed under such circumstances. Jack told who he was, and handed over his dispatches, the sentry who received them giving his name and regimental number.

"The Officer Commanding will be glad to get these dispatches," said the Mounted Policeman. "We have been at a loss to know what was going on outside. I dare say you'd like to know, in an unofficial way, that we are getting along fairly well, and that there is no illness in the fort save, of course, gun-shot wounds and such-like. With strict economy we have enough rations to hold out for another three weeks or so. At the end of that time we'll have to get more food somehow. In the meantime we've got to sit tight. It's a case of ten to one, you see."

Jack briefly told what he knew of the state of things elsewhere, and he and Pepin were preparing to go back by the way they had come when ominous sounds were heard down the creek. They could distinctly hear the murmur as of many voices.

"Ah, I have it!" said the dwarf. "These two chuckle-heads have met with more of the *Metis*, and they are coming up the *coulée* to look for the bear. Back that way we cannot go. What to do now, that is the question. Ah, I have it! We can go round the fort and sneak back by the south side. What do you say, Corporal Jones?"

"That's it, Pepin. Come with me, the two of you. I dare say you'll be able to make clear of the fort by another route. It's quite impossible to go back by the way you've come. Come on. You stay here, O'Brien, and give the alarm if you think the enemy meditates an attack. But they don't, or they wouldn't be making such an unholy row."

They passed round the Mounted Police Post of Battleford, which was now a very crowded and busy place indeed. Everywhere there were signs of preparations for a vigorous defence in case of attack. But they had no time to note details. Corporal Jones had

little time to spare, and the sooner that Jack and Pepin Quesnelle got safely back and through the rebel lines again, the less chance there would be of detection. As it was, Jack wondered by what fresh miracle they were again going to avoid the sentries of the *Metis*. The only thing that reassured Jack was the behaviour of his extraordinary little companion, Pepin Quesnelle. He did not seem put out in the very slightest degree. He joked with the Corporal, he chaffed Jack, and he addressed flattering and unflattering remarks to Antoine the bear. He was a weird mortal, truly. Jack thought, and he afterwards found he was quite right, that this manikin, by virtue of his keen wit, sharp tongue, and drastic methods, exercised an influence over the *Metis* with whom he came in contact that was second only to the power exerted by Riel himself. Only while the rebel leader was a fanatic and a visionary, and thirsted after temporal power, Pepin Quesnelle appraised his brother Half-Breeds at their true value, which was a comparatively negligible quantity, and realised that while they could not further the interests of the country, neither could they stem the inrush of a more practical and enterprising people. In the natural order of things

they could not expect to keep this great country merely as a hunting-ground for themselves. The greater world outside required more land to grow wheat in order to feed the millions, and the Breeds or *Metis* would not, or could not, do anything with it. They would have to allow others to do it for them.

When they arrived at a point where a depression in the land sloped to the outskirts of the village, and some small and isolated farm buildings showed themselves, Pepin Quesnelle declared that now he would be able to get through the lines of the *Metis* without much trouble. They said good-bye to the Mounted Policemen and stepped boldly out. Pepin took good care that Antoine kept close to them. In a few minutes more they were hailed by a Half-Breed sentry, but Pepin promptly responded, and asked if by any chance he had seen a horse which had strayed and was leading him a pretty dance.

The Breed replied that he had not, and asked Pepin if he knew he was in danger of getting fired on by the enemy, straying as he was within easy range of the Mounted Police lines. At this alarming piece of news the simple Pepin betrayed the greatest surprise and consternation, and, thanking the sentry, hastened

to regain the safety of the *Metis* camp. Pepin and Jack hurried away, Jean Claustre looking after them and laughing at what he imagined to be their childlike innocence. When they were out of sight of Monsieur Claustre, they turned round sharp to the right, and reached the place where Sergeant Pollock said he would meet Jack again, if he returned within a certain time.

"Pepin Quesnelle, by all that's wonderful!" exclaimed a voice, the owner of which they could not see in the shadow. "I thought you were in Prince Albert, Pepin! If I had only known you were in Battleford—but I see you have fallen in with my comrade, Jack Irwin of the Mounted Police. Well, wonders will never cease!"

"Aha, it is that sad dog Sergeant Pollock!" exclaimed the dwarf, in his turn surprised. "*Bien*, I will shake hands with you, *mon ami*. I am glad to see you once more again. It is two—three years since I did leave Prince Albert. You see, I come here because the mother she want to come, and one can only have one mother, you know, Shermoganish."[1]

"That is very true, Pepin, and I know you are the best of sons to your mother, and, of

[1] Indian for Policeman.

course, she thinks the world of you. But can't you spare an hour or so to come with us to where we have the dogs? You will drink some coffee with us, and then we must hasten on again. I am sure we have a lot to say to each other."

"Ah, well, I will come," said Pepin. "But I do not like to leave the mother too long! *Mais* she will understand when I tell her in one—two hours or so. Come on. Antoine, you villain, *marchez*!"

CHAPTER XI

AN EARLY START AND PURSUIT

WITHIN half an hour they were back at the deserted house where they had left Terence O'Donohue and the dogs. On the way there the Sergeant and Pepin kept up quite an animated conversation, so much so that they seemed to forget the fact that they might possibly be overheard by wandering Breeds, when, of course, trouble would ensue. Once, indeed, when they were passing what was evidently a deserted farmhouse, in close proximity to a stable and outbuildings, two men stepped out from the shadow and came towards them. Sergeant Pollock and Jack at once knew they were outposts of the enemy. For the moment they were faced with disaster, for even if they could succeed in overcoming and getting away from them, an alarm was sure to be given, and the chances were they would either be shot or captured. But Pepin

Quesnelle rose to the occasion. He called to Antoine, which up to that moment the two Breeds had not seen, and in a voice of remarkable volume for so small a man ordered them to stand.

"Ho, villains!" he cried, "what are you doing here? This place belongs to one of the *Metis*, and you have orders to keep away from such, and still I find you disobeying orders. Get out of it, I say, or I will set this bear upon you. See to them, Antoine!"

As Antoine at that moment moved towards them, the two Breeds did not wait to discuss the right or the wrong of the order they had received. They turned and made off as fast as their legs could carry them.

But Pepin, apprehensive that they might go back to the camp, and perhaps excite the curiosity of the rebels as to their identity, shouted after them that if they deserted their posts he would see to it that they would both be shot on the following morning. This brought them to a halt again, when the dwarf intimated that they would be wise to stop where they were, and continue their watch. This they evidently thought it as well to do.

"Blockheads — idiots!" exclaimed Pepin, as they went on again. "They have occa-

sioned us delay. We must now go in another direction, and then proceed when we are out of sight. They must not know where we go."

"You are right, Pepin. You were meant for a great general," said Sergeant Pollock. "But we need not go very far out of our way. We shall get into that *coulée*, and then travel up it."

Jack, as well as Sergeant Pollock, was very much relieved indeed at the result of their meeting with the enemy's picket. It would have been very annoying, to say the least of it, if they had been discovered just when their mission was successfully fulfilled. And they had yet to go on to Fort Pitt. So far all was well.

Fortune, however, was kind to them, for, as already intimated, they reached the homestead where Terence O'Donohue had stayed behind with the dogs. Unfortunately, it had not occurred to them that the presence of Antoine would create trouble, so when Laurier, and Piper and the other dogs scented him, there was a fine ado. They were naturally alarmed, and tried to break away. Antoine, however, seemed in no way concerned. He was doubtless accustomed to creating a sensation wherever he went. Laurier, Terence's steed, snorted furiously, and

kept fidgeting with his hind legs. It was fairly certain he would have used them with considerable effect upon Antoine if only he had got half a chance. When at last the various animals were quietened, Pepin entered the house with them, and preparations were made to have a kettleful of tea before they started out. Terence O'Donohue had met the dwarf before, and their meeting was cordial and characteristic. Jack, however, half suspected Terence of poking fun at the consequential Pepin, but seeing the dwarf evidently considered the flowery speeches and overdone deference of the little red-haired Irishman only his due, the laugh was not always to the Irishman.

As they were drinking steaming pannikins of tea, and Antoine lay stretched on the floor alongside his master, blinking across at Jack's dog Piper, which obviously did not at all like him, Terence said—

"Well, Pepin, it's surprised I am to find you a single man yet. I thought you, who are considered the catch of the Saskatchewan, would have been married long ago."

"Ah, that is so!" said the dwarf. "But it is no fault of these women that one of them has not married me. *Mon Dieu*, but they have

tried—so hard! But it would be foolish of Pepin to marry while there is the good mother to look after him. There is no one among them would be half as good as the mother."

"Shure an' ye're right there, Pepin," observed the Irishman soberly. "But last time I saw your mother—and she is wan av the best women in Saskatchewan, I'm thinkin'—she was sore distressed because some guyrl was settin' her cap at ye."

"Ah yes, I know," said the dwarf meditatively, and looking into the fire. "She was indeed nice girl, and daughter of Campbell, the biggest rancher in Saskatchewan; but the good mother said, which of course was true, that she must not aspire to the hand of Pepin Quesnelle."

"And bedad, she told her as much! But I understand Miss Campbell—she was an Honourable, now I think of it—afterwards married the son av the Lieutenant-Governor."

"Ah yes, that is so. She was sensible girl, and saw it was better to—what you call it—stick to her own class." And the dwarf poked the fire.

"Well, an' we can't all be saddlers!" commented Terence O'Donohue philosophically.

Jack would have laughed outright had he not been so amazed at the exalted opinion the manikin evidently entertained of his own importance. Terence O'Donohue afterwards told Jack that, with the exception of this one weakness—the delusion that all the most eligible women in Saskatchewan were desirous of marrying him—Pepin Quesnelle was really a man of intelligence much above the average, and of decided character. When Jack afterwards thought about the matter, he came to the conclusion that Providence indeed was wise and beneficent when it hid from this poor dwarf what would have been the soul-crushing knowledge of his hopeless physical condition, and made him believe that he was a great deal better than most men.

"And aren't you afraid, Pepin, that Riel or some of the rebels will get to know that you have been here with us—that you have, in fact, helped us?" asked Sergeant Pollock.

The dwarf slid from the end of the long form on to which he had climbed, and drew himself up with a world of dignity. Jack noted that he had rather a fine and striking face, if, perhaps, his nose was just a trifle too pronounced. He stuck one hand into his fur coat, and threw the other out with a melodramatic gesture.

"Eh!—what?—I, Pepin Quesnelle, afraid of that—what you call it?—ah, *oui*, I have it—*canaille*—riff-raff! *Pouf!*" He stopped short as if language failed him to express the depths of his contempt for such a suggestion. He snapped his fingers and resumed: "Bah! Who is there amongst the *Metis* would dare to interfere with me? Who is there would have the courage to question what I choose to do? Bah! Have I not told the *Metis* two—three times already that they are doing that which is foolishness, which will only take from them what they have already got? And have I not told Louis Riel himself that I can see him in the eye of my mind hanging on the gallows-tree, and others of the *Metis* and the Indians with him? And has he ever dared to ask me why I tell it? No, I am not 'fraid for myself, but I know that the *Metis*, like the Indian, when once he goes upon the warpath is as a man mad, and seeing through blood. I would not wish harm to come to you or any of the Canadians which I might not be able to prevent. The *Metis* know me, and perhaps I, too, am one of the *Metis* so far as the blood is in me, but I also know that I am not of them so far as I can see what they cannot, and so far as I can feel what

they cannot. But fear them, no! If there is any fear it is they who feel it—for me!"

While the dwarf had been declaiming, Jack, as well as those who were in the room, realised that they were listening to one whose every utterance was a truth, and who, despite his deformed body, was as far above his kind in his mental outlook as day is different from night. While he spoke, they lost sight of the fact that this man, physically, was a burlesque on humanity—they were looking upon and listening to a man of heart and brain. And yet he was the selfsame being who only a few minutes before had stirred them to laughter and to pity!

For a moment there was silence, then Sergeant Pollock spoke. But before he did so, he rose from the bench on which he was seated, and, with an inclination of his head to Pepin, said—

"I put it so badly—so very badly, and I beg your pardon. Of course I did not mean that you would really be afraid for yourself—you would not be here if you were afraid. That goes without saying. Now, before we go, I would like to thank you for what you have done for us this night. I shall not

forget it the longest day I live. I hope you will honour me by shaking hands, Pepin Quesnelle."

Pepin took the Sergeant's hand and bowed low over it. "That is all right," he said. "It is I, Pepin Quesnelle, who am honoured. Every one in this land knows Sergeant Pollock —how there is no braver man in the country than he. And now I must get back to the mother. Besides, it will not do for Antoine to be here much longer, or those dogs will go crazy. And that horse with the nose that looks two ways for Sunday—ah, that horse! I know he is—what you call it?—prodigal—a prodigal horse. Well, it will not do for Antoine to be here when you lead him out; the two would not—what you call it?—reciprocate. Adieu, and good luck—very mooch good luck! Adieu!"

And so saying, Pepin Quesnelle shook hands with them, and took his departure, Antoine shuffling at his heels.

"Shure an' he's a broth av a boy that Pepin!" said Terence O'Donohue after he had gone. "A perfect little gintleman, bedad!"

"You're right, Terence, about him being a gentleman," said Sergeant Pollock. "He is

a gentleman at heart, despite some of his odd ways. It's wonderful how those Breeds stand in awe of him. One or two more like him amongst them and this rebellion would never have started. But certain of their leaders, you see, stumped the country, and Pepin could not stand up against them alone. Any other Breeds saying the one half of what he has said would have been murdered long ago. I think we had better pull out now. We'll put in a good stage before we stop again."

They made ready for a start, and in another ten minutes were on the trail again, Sergeant Pollock and Jack in the lead, and Terence O'Donohue with Laurier bringing up the rear. The scent of the bear evidently lingered about the homestead, for all the animals betrayed considerable uneasiness. But when once they were started they seemed in a hurry to get away from the scent of that bear. They evidently realised it was neither a bracing nor reassuring atmosphere.

It was now four or five o'clock in the morning, and, as the dogs had been well seen to, they were comparatively fresh. They took a trail that led in a north-westerly direction. They had now only some hundred miles or so

farther to go in order to reach Fort Pitt, and it looked as if they were going to successfully accomplish it. Considering the dangers that had beset them hitherto, they could consider themselves very lucky indeed. True, by far the most dangerous part of the route had yet to be negotiated, for the farther north they went the farther were they getting away from the relief columns. Of course it was as certain as anything can be certain in this world that British law and order, as represented by Canadian troops, must triumph eventually, and the ignorant and misguided Breeds must suffer and be punished for their crimes; but until these Canadian troops actually arrived there was the menace of death and famine on that northern trail. Indeed, there was much death in the land at that moment, and in a very grim and terrible form—men and women, and priests as well, having been massacred as they worshipped in church—at Frog Lake, and other instances too numerous to mention. Yes, the rebel and fanatic Louis Riel had much to answer for.

And when they did manage to run the blockade and get into Fort Pitt their troubles would not be over. The garrison would most likely be in a weakened condition, and probably short

of provisions. Their own rations would all be finished by that time. And they might have to wait until the reliefs came, and goodness only knew how long they might have to wait. When the great thaw came, and it might come any day, the country would be impassable for a week at least, and that would have to be added to the weary wait which was surely in store for them when they got there—if they ever got there. But get there they must. The garrison had to be reassured that help was on the way up, and that if they only held out, and suffered starvation, they would triumph in the end. But it was a drab-coloured outlook—a very far from cheerful or hopeful one. Starvation would be as a terrible force against them.

They noted that the flare of the burning buildings in Battleford had disappeared, and the beating upon the Indian drums, and other things even less musical, had ceased. They were congratulating themselves upon having steered clear of the village, and those who might be wandering in the vicinity of it, when suddenly a shot rang out some few hundred yards to the right of them. Next moment it was followed by another report.

"They've seen us, Jack. Keep your dogs

at it," cried Sergeant Pollock, half turning in his seat. "I don't know how many of the rascals there may be, but anyhow we've got to get a rustle on in the meantime."

The dogs did not require much persuasion to increase their speed. Up till now the drivers had been rather checking it. It was not a bad trail, and fairly straight. They would give the enemy a run, at all events. When they were obliged to stop they had their rifles, and would give a good account of themselves. As Sergeant Pollock had said, it was difficult to say what strength was pitted against them. The fact remained that they were still dangerously near Battleford, and if the enemy proved to be a band of Breeds pushing on to Fort Pitt in order to strengthen the besiegers there, they —Sergeant Pollock's party—would eventually be driven into the lines of the *Metis* around Fort Pitt. They would be caught as in a trap, for if they attempted to turn off into trails they did not know, the end might come for them all the more quickly.

It was a pity that the dawn had not yet come, for then they might have been able to get an idea of the enemy's strength. Again, it might enable the *Metis* to make better practice. Jack came to the conclusion, and

afterwards he learned that he was correct in his surmises, that the Sergeant's one idea was to get as far away as possible from Battleford before he ventured on reprisals. He was one of the best shots in a force which was celebrated for good shots. The farther from Battleford the better for them.

For the next several minutes Jack was only concerned in keeping the dogs on the gallop. He did not wish to tire them, but it was essential that they should get out of range as speedily as possible—if they were able to do that. The faster they went the less likely would the enemy be to fire upon them. The Breeds would reckon upon eventually tiring them out and running them down by their superior numbers. They had been at the game all their lives.

Looking back, Jack saw that the trail which the enemy was on ran into the one they were following. If the *Metis* had only started earlier, so as to have reached the junction of the two trails before Sergeant Pollock did, then the latter would have been hopelessly cut off. As it was, it was certain they would be too late to do that, though in the grey dawn that was now breaking the enemy would be able to make better shooting. If only they—the

Metis — could contrive to kill a dog, if not the driver himself, in the leading team, then the whole train must come to a stop, and they had them at their mercy. But they were five to one, and, in the natural order of things, they must eventually run the Police scouting party down. They realised it must be a Police scouting party, or one carrying some important message to the beleaguered Fort Pitt. That message might make all the difference in the world to the success of their campaign. If only Battleford and Fort Pitt fell, then eventual victory was as good as assured. But it was absolutely necessary that no news of any relief party should get through to them. And here, presumably, was a party carrying news.

They kept the dogs on a steady trot—not too fast so as to play them out, but just as fast as the circumstances would permit; still it was evident that the pursuing party was making the better time. In the natural order of things they must in the end prevail. But it would save both themselves and their dogs if they could manage to incapacitate that leading team. They would then have the others at their mercy. The two trails had now met, and the pursuing party was not

more than four or five hundred yards or so in the rear. As night had now given place to day, and a wan greyness spread over the face of the great snow-clad land, the situation showed up very plainly indeed. Objects, such as an outcrop of rock on the crest of a rolling hill, or a lonely log hut alongside an ice and snow covered slough, were comparatively few and far between. Now that the stars had disappeared, and the moon had failed to assert herself and hung in the heavens like a pale and imperfect globe, which one might easily overlook if it did not just happen to catch one's eye, there was not much to distract one's attention from the business in hand. But of course there were always the dogs, on which so much depended. And there were the pursuers, four or five teams of them, making excellent time, and showing up clearly and distinctly when one looked back upon them. It was fortunate for the party that the rifles of the enemy were mostly adapted for comparatively short ranges, otherwise the chase would not have lasted as long as it did. There was no sound to be heard save the swish of the runners over the snow, the dull, muffled pounding of Laurier's hoofs, or the hard breathing of the canines. At times, perhaps, there would be the

calls of the drivers to the dogs as they showed signs of slackening. Something would have to happen soon; for, of course, neither pursuers nor pursued could keep on as they were doing.

Doubtless the enemy realised the necessity of bringing matters to a head, for they pulled up, and, lying down in the snow, opened a well-directed fire upon the steadily moving teams. The bullets fairly whistled round the party, or tore up the snow dangerously close to them. Suddenly and unexpectedly they came to a dip in the trail. Sergeant Pollock switched off it to the right, so as to make room for the others, and jumped out of his sleigh.

"Out with you, boys, and we'll give them tit for tat. There's good cover here, and they've got none. The range is about four hundred yards. Now, just take it easy, and aim deliberately and slowly. It's a four-hundred-yard range, remember, and only careful shooting is any good at all."

It was, indeed, a lucky and unexpected turn in fortune's wheel. Cover for them—that made all the difference! In another minute they had left their respective teams standing safely in the dip, and were lying on their faces,

some three or four yards apart, on the crest of the rise.

"Hello, they are going to separate and string out!" cried Sergeant Pollock. "Well, there are enough of them to outflank us if they want to. Now, Jack, you take the team that remains on the trail; you, Terence, take that one that is bearing off to the left; and I'll take the one that is coming on like a steam-engine on the right. Now, cool and steady, and fire a few paces in front."

There was a bang, bang, bang! and still another and yet another bang! and then a shout that sounded very like a hurrah from Jack. He had evidently either killed or seriously disabled the leading dog or dogs in the team he had fired upon, for it came to a sudden stop, and hopeless confusion seemed to ensue. The leading dog wheeled and pitched head over heels, and the others became tangled up. The Breed driver, jumping from his sleigh, seemed to have his work cut out in preventing still worse confusion. And then Jack made it so warm for him that the surprised and alarmed Breed was obliged to lie down in the snow. The boy kept him in a very nervous condition indeed for the next few minutes.

"Keep on breaking up that team, Jack," Sergeant Pollock cried to him. "I'm sorry to have to knock out those poor brutes, but remember our own lives, and doubtless lots of other lives at Fort Pitt, depend upon our getting clear of these devils. Now give that second team a taste of your marksmanship."

Sergeant Pollock himself made really excellent practice. He actually picked off the Breed who was driving the team that was making strenuous efforts to outflank them on the right. The wounded man swayed, then fell off the sleigh. The dogs, realising that now they had got rid of all control, careered wildly off over the snow-clad prairie. Then the Sergeant shot the third dog in the second sleigh, and, as with the other teams, indescribable confusion immediately resulted.

As for Terence O'Donohue, he had two horse teams to deal with, and he did full justice to them. He aimed at and wounded the leading horse in the first team. It kept on for a few yards, then came to a dead stop. And then he evidently hit the Breed who was driving the second team, for that individual fell to the bottom of the sleigh and did not show up again. The horse got off the trail, and floundered about in deep snow. The more it plunged the

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worse fix it got itself into. But there were still a couple of Breeds left on the trail. They had got out of the sleighs in order to guard against a probable wheeling or backward move. It was their bullets that whistled unpleasantly over the heads of the Police party, or ploughed up the snow in a still more disconcerting fashion almost under their noses.

"Jack, we've got to make it impossible for them to continue with those teams," cried the Sergeant. "They must not be left with sufficient dogs to make up a single team. We'll only live to regret it if we allow them to. They'd follow us up and attack us in the night if we did."

Five minutes later and the enemy was in full retreat. Such of them as could not, it was fairly certain, would not again be in a position to advance and attack. The Police had smashed up their pursuers in a very effectual manner indeed. It was also fairly certain that the three marksmen who had been left on the trail to watch and keep down their fire while the others advanced had more or less come to grief. Sergeant Pollock, who was one of the best shots in the North-West Mounted Police Force, had got the range to a nicety and put in bull's-eyes !

"I think we can pull out again," said the Mounted Policeman. "They are hopelessly crippled, and couldn't raise a sound team of dogs now if they wanted to. And their horse-flesh is done for."

"Bedad, and I'm thinkin' some av them fellers will never have sore heads again," observed the Irishman.

"That is very likely so, Terence, but we can't go back to find out. You know the old Indian dodge of shamming dead—some of these fellows may be doing the same thing. We'll leave them severely alone—that's the best we can do for them."

Jack thought this was rather a narrow and hard-hearted attitude of Sergeant Pollock to adopt with regard to a foe that they had so severely punished, and which might at that moment be requiring aid. Surely the voice of humanity demanded their responding to it. But a few minutes later they realised how foolish it would have been if they had gone back. They were driving away again when from the Breeds' sleighs came three shots. Their bullets ploughed up the snow in very dangerous proximity to the Police party. The wonder was none of them were hit.

"Botheration take them! and are ye goin'

to stand that, Sergeant?" cried Terence O'Donohue, who had made a narrow escape. "I'll tache them manners. Here's back into the dip again an' at them fellers. Go on if ye like—I'll catch you up again."

But Sergeant Pollock and Jack, once they had started on the trail, could not well turn back. Besides, they knew that Terence O'Donohue could be trusted to look after himself. He was a good shot, and would doubtless square accounts with the treacherous enemy.

Terence O'Donohue did so. He actually left his team in the creek, and, crawling to a little rise, was able to effectually command the enemy's position. When he withdrew fifteen minutes later it was as certain as anything could well be that no more trouble need be apprehended from their late pursuers.

"Now then, Laurier," he said, when he was seated once more in his box-sleigh, "step out!"

CHAPTER XII

THE MELTING OF THE SNOWS

WITHIN half an hour, so well did Laurier "step out" that Terence O'Donohue had picked up his two companions again. All that day they kept on, for there was a dull look in the sky, and they very soon made the rather unwelcome discovery that the frost had ceased, and a light wind was blowing from the south-west that predicted a very speedy thaw.

"A Chinook wind, by all that's unlucky!" exclaimed Sergeant Pollock when they stopped that evening in a *coulée* some little distance off the trail for their evening meal. "If it keeps on for another six hours our sleighs will be useless, and we'll have to tramp the rest of the way. I suppose you know what a Chinook wind is, Jack?"

"I've heard of them, but I never experienced one," was the reply.

"Well, as I dare say you know, a Chinook wind is a warm current of air from the Pacific Ocean on the other side of the Rockies. It finds its way over the tops of them, and through the passes, with the result that a thaw in this part of the world is one of the quickest things in nature. I've known our fellows in Alberta go out in sleighs in the morning, when the temperature was down to about zero, and have to abandon them and walk back to barracks, for the very good and sufficient reason that there was no snow to carry the runners. It had melted as if by magic. We'll have to keep on the march while we can, if we don't want to be stranded on the prairie."

"Shure, it is wan av the dhivil's own thricks," observed Terence O'Donohue; "but ye're right entirely, Sergeant, we'll have to keep on goin'."

They resumed their journey, and kept on until it became too dark to distinguish the trail. Then they stopped in order to camp for the night, or at least some part of it.

"It will likely freeze again before morning," observed the Sergeant, "and if so, we'll have to be up in order to take full advantage of it before the sun rises. I can see a hard day before us to-morrow."

They fed the dogs as liberally as their store of frozen fish would permit, and turned in. An hour or two later the temperature fell again and it froze. Long before it grew light they had partaken of a pannikin of hot tea and some beef and Johnnie cakes, and started out again. They kept steadily on for two or three hours, and made good progress. By the time the sun shone above the horizon, however, the warm Chinook wind was blowing, and the snow was melting before their eyes. It became heavy pulling for the dogs. It was odd to see the highest pieces of ground become bare first. On a little butte or hill to the right of them the crest was quite bare. It was a reversal of the usual order of things in the eyes of those accustomed to Old World conditions.

"Keep them at it, Jack," cried Sergeant Pollock. "In another hour or so we'll have to abandon the sleighs and walk. Our only chance of getting through at all is to take advantage of the next few hours."

How they strained every nerve to cover the ground that day! Every minute was precious, for the snow was fast disappearing, or at least becoming so soft and sloppy that it would soon be impossible to use its surface

at all. In the meantime it was their medium of transport ; in an hour or two they would be obliged to avoid it and use the sodden earth or turf instead. And that, of course, would mean that they should have to abandon the sleighs and walk.

" We'll have to leave the trail now, Jack," Sergeant Pollock said. " The prairie will carry us better. Besides, we'll have to leave our sleighs where the rebels won't be likely to see them. You see, we may not be able to get through their lines at Fort Pitt as easily as we imagine, and if any of them happened to come on behind us, and discovered our gear, then they would know we were somewhere about and look out for us."

" And what about the dogs and Laurier ? " asked Jack.

" We must try and take them with us. I don't believe in deserting the animals that have been faithful servants to us if it is at all possible to take them along. But then if we can't, of course that settles it. The Breeds wouldn't harm them. They'd simply stick to them for future use."

" That wouldn't make it so hard if we were obliged to leave them behind," observed Jack. " I'd like to see some of those fellows' faces

when they came to take possession of Laurier. They'd find they'd caught a Tartar with a vengeance."

"Yes," said the Sergeant, smiling; "I wouldn't mind witnessing the proceedings."

The travelling became worse and worse. As the afternoon wore on there was a fresh factor of discomfort to deal with. The melting snow created sloughs or great ponds everywhere. Indeed some of them resembled miniature lakes. The members of the party now no longer rode in the sleighs. They walked alongside them, which, of course, made their progress much slower. In order to lighten the loads they had thrown certain articles away. They even made packs and carried various necessaries on their shoulders so as to save the dogs. Laurier showed up well. Like most horses of excitable and uncertain temper he was a good worker. The box-sleigh which he drew was abandoned, and certain articles were packed on his back. Contrary to expectations, he made a splendid pack horse. Terence O'Donohue was a very proud man indeed.

"Look at him!" he exclaimed, as at one point they walked abreast. "An' did ye iver see the loikes av him! There's not

another horse in the counthry to equal him, an' he'll kape on till he drops."

"He's a stayer and no mistake," agreed Sergeant Pollock. "Of course we'll try and stick to him if we have got to let the dogs go. They'll probably soon find new masters, and, anyhow, they'll be able to rustle for themselves seeing the thaw has come."

The travelling became worse. Their moccasins were now soaking wet, and altogether they were in a sorry plight. What with having to wind in and out of the hollows so as to follow the snow, they found they were really losing time.

"Unhitch the dogs, Jack," said Sergeant Pollock. "I see a shack over there. We'll go in and make some tea, and then go on again. We ought to make Fort Pitt some time to-night if we've got luck."

They trudged over to the shack in question, and had a much-needed meal and a rest. The thaw had now set in in earnest, and it was unlikely there would be a return of the frost of the previous night. This would cause them to alter their plans considerably.

"We're within five or six miles of Fort Pitt now," said Sergeant Pollock. "About ten o'clock or so we'll continue our march, and

that will take us to the fort a little after midnight. I've just been thinking out a plan for creating a distraction when we come to run the blockade. But it will be a difficult job to reassure the Police sentries as to who we are. We'll have to take risks on that, though."

"If you take on the dogs and turn them loose when we get up to the rebel lines," said Jack, "they will probably scatter and fight with the crowd of dogs that are sure to be there. That will create a distraction, and I don't think that under the circumstances the enemy would notice us at all if we went boldly amongst them as if we were after the dogs; they would imagine we belonged to themselves. Besides, they mightn't be able to make us out in the dark."

"That is so, Jack. That's exactly what I've been thinking we might do," said Sergeant Pollock. "And perhaps there won't be quite so much danger in approaching the Police sentries as we imagine. I've got a couple of coloured lights—one yellow and one red—in a little tin canister here, and we'll burn them just when we think we are fairly through the rebel lines. That will be a signal to those in the fort that there are friends outside who are trying to reach them. That will minimise

the risks of being shot by their sentries. We needn't be very far apart. These dogs are bound to raise quite a racket and considerable confusion when once we turn them loose. And the *Metis* are unlikely to suspect such a ruse."

In talking over the matter at least, it all seemed very simple and feasible. It remained to be seen whether in practice it would work out quite so well. It seemed not unlikely that there would be some considerable risks arising from inquisitive Breeds, suspicious British sentries, and consequent hasty shooting. And there was always the danger of the unforeseen—the hitherto unconsidered factors that usually cropped up to upset one's plans at the eleventh hour.

"But we've got to do it, Jack," said Sergeant Pollock. "There's no possible funking it or getting out of it, even if we wanted to ever so badly. We've got no more food, we're in the enemy's country, and we'd be discovered to-morrow for a dead certainty if we didn't go on. But of course there's no question about that. We've got to deliver those dispatches this very night."

"And, shure, I can make a dash for the fort on Laurier's back," said O'Donohue.

"And get shot for certain," observed the

Sergeant. "No, that won't do, Terence. Making a dash in on horseback would resemble Indian methods too closely. I'm afraid you'll have to leave Laurier behind. You may be able to get him later if you turn him loose, and you can be pretty sure he won't allow any Breed or Indian to collar him."

"I'm obeying orders, Sergeant," replied the Irishman resignedly. "You say the word when I've to turn him loose and loose he goes."

"That's the right spirit, Terence. You see, it's not what we'd like to do; it's what circumstances force us to do."

They gave the dogs the last of the frozen fish, which were now in a rather critical condition, and, having finished what provisions they had brought with them, lay down for an hour or two before starting out again. It was eloquent of that day's toilsome journey that, although in a decidedly damp and uncomfortable condition, Jack went to sleep almost immediately. They would now be obliged to leave even the buffalo robes they had slept in behind. Their firearms were all they would be able to take with them. They had practically reached their goal—the objective of their strenuous and dangerous trip—and

all they now possessed was such clothes as they stood up in. If only, however, they managed to deliver their dispatches, they would have achieved the object of their trip. It would mean a very great deal to them, not to speak of all it meant to the besieged ones.

CHAPTER XIII

A BOLD DASH

TEN o'clock, and Sergeant Pollock aroused Jack as he lay on a pile of straw on which his one remaining blanket was spread. He woke, feeling decidedly cold and stiff.

"Ho, Jack!" said the Sergeant. "Time to pull out. I wouldn't have let you sleep in those wet clothes of yours, only I couldn't keep you awake. You'll feel better when once you've started."

"Glory to goodness, there's some moonlight!" observed Terence O'Donohue. "D'ye hear the wather dripping from the sod roof? It's a thaw wid a vengeance, and no mistake."

They marshalled the dogs in two teams as hitherto, but now, as there were no sleighs to draw, Jack soon found that these strenuous canines meant to pull him along. Indeed it was as much as he could do to hold them

back. They appeared to understand that something quite beyond the ordinary was afoot. Previous seasons and experiences told them that another period of release from their labours was at hand. They almost pulled Jack off his feet as, rifle slung across back, he held on with both hands to the stout shaganappi [1] that kept them in check. There would be no great difficulty in releasing them when the time came to do so. Sergeant Pollock was in the lead, Jack followed, and Terence O'Donohue brought up the rear with Laurier.

"Jack," Terence O'Donohue had said just before starting, "why don't ye ride Laurier? Shure, and ye'll find him as biddable as any well-broken Canadian colt, and as aisy as a rocking-chair."

"Thank you, Terence; I don't want to appear ungrateful, but I prefer to bide the Lord's time," was the reply.

"Get out wid you!" exclaimed Terence. But he laughed as he said it, and Jack noted that he made no attempt to get on Laurier's back himself.

It was a terrible walk, and but for the light of the moon and the starlight it was hard to

[1] Belt of dressed hide.

say what mishaps would have befallen them. There were places between the billows of rolling prairie where they had to wade through regular lakes, and more than once they had to ford newly-born creeks that ran like mill-races. But the dogs behaved splendidly, and they made good progress. Still it was not until about midnight that Sergeant Pollock reined in the dogs and announced that Fort Pitt was in sight, and that the scattered camp of the enemy, the *Metis*, lay below. They pulled up close to the base of a little butte or hill to decide on the best method of reaching the beleaguered fort. The most crucial part of the whole trip lay before them.

"I once thought that the best way to reach the fort would be for us to separate and create a distraction," said Sergeant Pollock, "but now I think the best thing we can do is to keep comparatively together—within thirty yards or so of one another—in case we require mutual help. As, of course, I can't say exactly how the sentries of the *Metis* are placed, I think we may as well try to reach the fort from this side as any other."

"The ground seems low here, and appears to be more or less flooded," observed Jack. "The chances are it won't be so well guarded."

"That is very likely. Anyhow, in case of attack, the handicap will be the same for the enemy as ourselves, and there is just the chance, as you say, that the *Metis* won't be quite so numerous here. There's hardly a light anywhere. It's no use delaying. I'll go in the lead—you keep about thirty yards or so to the right of me. Terence, you keep about the same distance on my left. And you'd better turn Laurier adrift. He'd only draw attention to us. That's right, Terence"—the bridle was slipped off the head of the truculent Laurier. "Now then, comrades, let's get on. At a whistle from me, Jack, turn the dogs loose, and remember sing out when you approach the Police lines. But first I'll light these coloured flares. They're sure to be seen from the fort, and the chances are the Breeds, if they do happen to see them, won't know what to make of them."

The coloured lights in question flared up for a minute, then went out.

"Now then, step out," said the Sergeant. "They'll have seen those lights at the fort, and be on the look-out for us."

"What a row these dogs in the *Metis*' camp are making!" observed Jack. "And can't you hear them talking? They've seen the

lights too, of course, and are coming to find out what they mean."

"So much the better," said Sergeant Pollock. "If we dodge farther round to the left the better chance there will be of finding a place free of their sentries. Hurry up."

They ran quickly to the left in the direction of what looked like a clump of trees. They would be less likely to be noticed there. There could be no doubt the *Metis* had seen their flares, and the alarm had been given, for they could hear the enemy calling to one another as they ran towards the point which they had just left.

"We'll stop here for a minute so as to get back our wind, and to give some of these fellows a chance to pass us," said Sergeant Pollock. "Hello! Do you hear that row?"

As Jack and his two companions crouched in lee of the uneven belt of cotton-wood trees and bedraggled undergrowth, they heard an ominous sound. It was a great hollow roar as of distant thunder. The cause of it might have been, and possibly was, ten or fifteen miles away or more, but it was instinct with the exercise of some gigantic force in Nature. It would have made their hearts beat more quickly even if there had been no other con-

tributing cause, such as the knowledge of the critical and dangerous position they were then in, and the yet greater dangers that they knew still lay ahead.

"Glory to goodness! If that isn't the Saskatchewan River breaking up!" exclaimed Terence O'Donohue. "You see, the snows have been meltin' on the Rockies hundreds and hundreds of miles and all the rest of it from here, and the river has come down in flood. It's forcin' up that six-foot floor of ice, and it's fifty-pound guns and five-hundred-pound guns aren't in it wid the almighty row them 'xplosions are makin'."

It was, indeed, only too true. The ice on the great Saskatchewan River was breaking up, and the crackling, rending, and shivering could be heard for a distance of twenty miles and more. And all the time it was coming nearer!

"I've got an idea this will alter the plans of the campaign a bit," observed Sergeant Pollock. "It was a jolly good thing for us we pushed on as we did. We'd have been too late to-morrow."

Such was indeed the case. Had every minute and hour not been fully taken advantage of on their trip, they would never have reached Fort Pitt.

But they had still to deliver their dispatches.

In the moonlight they caught sight of several Breeds running in the direction from which they had just come. They were going to investigate the cause of those mysterious lights. Suddenly they caught sight of a large dark figure coming towards them.

"It's some one on horseback!" exclaimed Sergeant Pollock.

But it was presuming the man on the back of the horse. It was not quite clear enough to make any such distinction at that distance.

"It's Laurier!" exclaimed Jack. "It's your steed, Terence, and, like a faithful friend, he doesn't intend being separated from you. He's following you up."

"Well, I'm blowed!" exclaimed Sergeant Pollock, with obvious chagrin.

"Be jabers!" exclaimed the Irishman. "And didn't I tell you that was a horse wid bhrains and wid a heart behind his——"

"Oh, rubbish, Terence!" observed Sergeant Pollock, not a little annoyed over the reappearance of the horse which they had all thought had been got rid of. "The confounded animal will call attention to us. He's coming straight for us, the——"

But what Sergeant Pollock was going to say is only a matter of conjecture. Something of greater importance was about to happen. As the decidedly deceptive Laurier came slowly towards them with drooping head, an attitude suggestive of acute dejection and a desire for rest, three Breeds catching sight of him approached him from different directions. They doubtless supposed he was some farmer's horse in the neighbourhood that had broken loose, and each wanted a fresh mount seeing the thaw had come. But they had not counted upon meeting with a horse endowed with the peculiar qualities of Laurier.

"Now for a bit of fun," whispered Jack, who, although, like the others, chafing over the enforced delay, and desperately anxious to get on, was by no means averse to again witnessing an exhibition of Laurier's, literally, striking qualities. After all, despite what Jack had so lately gone through, and, moreover, what he was going through at that very moment, he was only a boy. He knew that Terence's horse was going to give these Breeds such a surprise as they never before had in their lives.

Any one who did not know him would have imagined that Laurier did not notice his would-be captors at all. But they would have

been sadly mistaken. The moment one Breed stepped up directly in front of him, and the two others simultaneously put their hands out to secure him, Laurier gave a species of equine squeal that perhaps only the prairie-bred horse can produce to perfection. He fairly rushed open-mouthed at the Breed in front of him, and, seizing him by the coat, shook him as a terrier might a rat. At the same moment he wheeled and lashed out with his hind legs, and the Breed on the offside went down like a ninepin. Without pausing to note the effect of this double movement, he rushed upon the third Breed on the near side, and, figuratively, wiped his feet on the three of them. Then with a wild snort of triumph and defiance, and an energetic display of hind legs, he bolted madly over the muddy prairie, to the surprise and consternation of all who happened to be anywhere near his erratic course.

"Well done, Laurier, old boy, and thank goodness you are once more at liberty, though I'd like to meet you some other day!" cried Sergeant Pollock. "Come on, boys! no use stopping here any longer. Ah, here are the dogs coming! Now we're in for it! Be ready to use your guns if necessary."

It was as Sergeant Pollock said; the camp dogs had not been long in discovering the presence of the half-savage sleigh dogs, and came trotting up from all directions to give battle to the mysterious newcomers.

"Unslip your dogs, Jack, and I'll do the same here," cried the Sergeant, who was now within a few paces of him. "Terence, give a hand, then make for the fort. Jack, keep your own dog close to heel. You may find him useful."

In another minute the sleigh dogs, which, of course, had not been at liberty since they started on the trip, were madly careering in all directions. They were born fighters, like all Northern dogs, every one of them, and as they had not wanted for food since they started, and were in fair condition, the first privilege they naturally hastened to avail themselves of on gaining their liberty was to indulge in a good fight with the very first strange dog they came across.

Within five minutes the lines of the *Metis*, for a distance of a mile or more, was the scene of a score or so of dog-fights. Such a pandemonium had never been experienced in that or any other camp. Excited Breeds were running in all directions, shouting and

anathematising the strange dog or dogs that were attacking or worrying their own. Such a furious din, occasioned by the barking, yelping, snarling, and growling canines, it is impossible to describe by means of words. It beggared all description. One would have thought the entire dog-world of the North-West territories, with the United States of America thrown in, was indulging in one grand Waterloo on that muddy flat where the sage bush grew. Here and there a gun went off, but whether by design or accident it was hard to say. Within five minutes of the sleigh dogs being turned loose, it was fairly certain that every dog within a radius of three miles was engaged in active combat.

At first Jack had been alarmed for the safety of his dog Piper, for two or three of the huskies had doubtless had it in for him. Human nature, let alone dog nature, could not be expected to look with composure upon one who roamed at his will, apparently did not toil, and most likely fared upon something more dainty than frozen fish. These sleigh dogs had hitherto never got a chance of openly letting Piper know what they thought of him. Three liberated huskies, therefore made a dash for him. But Piper was ready for

them. They must have regretted their precipitancy afterwards if they survived the practical snub Jack's dog administered. The experienced and scientific canine — to adapt a sporting and technical form of speech to existing conditions—fairly wiped the prairie with them. He caught them by throat, neck, or back, whichever presented least difficulties, and threw them about as if they were as many obstreperous puppies that wanted punishing. They fled, to look for a less scientific opponent.

Sergeant Pollock, Jack, and Terence O'Donohue ran towards the fort, taking care to keep some thirty yards or so apart from one another. In the confusion occasioned by the grim dog-fight, and the uncertainty that prevailed amongst the Breeds as to whether they were not being attacked by some mysterious foe, it may be safely asserted that the individual *Metis* themselves who happened to desert their posts ran as much danger of being shot by other *Metis* as they did.

Jack ran as quickly as the sloppy ground would permit, Piper running alongside. Two or three Breeds passed close to him, but hardly one of them gave him more than a passing glance. One of them addressed him, and asked if he knew what all the commotion

was about, and Jack laughingly replied that that was exactly what he wanted to find out. Another, evidently suspicious, ran towards him, rifle in hand, but Jack addressed him as Baptiste, and wanted to know if he had seen St. Croix anywhere, and that reassured the questioner, whose name was evidently the one by which he was addressed.

But Jack was not going to get through the enemy's lines so easily as he had begun to think he would. He was passing round what looked like a sod-built corral, and was congratulating himself upon the fact that he must by this time be clear of the enemy's sentries, when some one stepped out of the shadow and stood right in front of him. He held a rifle at the ready, and it was pointed at Jack's breast. For the moment Jack's heart sank within him. They were within three paces of each other, and the enemy had the "dead-drop" on Jack.

"Halt there!" cried the enemy. "What brings you in this direction?"

It was no Breed that addressed Jack: it was some one who spoke excellent English. Still, it was one of the enemy. For the moment Jack was taken aback. Surely this could not be one of the Police sentries! He was not

yet clear of the enemy's lines. Next moment Jack had recovered his presence of mind, and replied—

"I suppose I am here for the same reason that is sending the rest of them all over the place. My dogs have broken loose. Have you seen two hitched together pass this way? I saw them a minute ago."

"Young fellow, you must take me for no end of an ass," said the Englishman, who was evidently on the side of the rebels. "Just let me have a good look at your face. Ah yes, I thought so! Don't you remember me? Quick, down with that gun of yours and give me those dispatches or I blow the top off your head before you can say 'Jack Robinson'!"

And now as the light of the moon fell upon his opponent's face, Jack saw and realised that the dark-featured man who stood in front of him, with an ugly grin upon his face, was no other than the man George whom he had seen hanging around Qu'Appelle in the company of some so-called friendly Breeds on the morning when he started out. He remembered that this man George had been described to him as a doubtful character, and he rather suspected that he had been at the bottom of that first

attack upon his party beyond Piapot's Reserve. But how he had contrived to get ahead of him now was rather puzzling. It was not unlikely that, having a very good idea concerning the mission upon which Sergeant Pollock and he, Jack, were bound, the spy and renegade George had resolved to put the Breeds on their guard against the tactics the Government were employing. It was surely a wonderful piece of luck—so far as he, George, was concerned—that he should fall in with this stripling just when he had begun to think he had eluded his grasp. Jack noticed the almost sardonic look of triumph upon his adversary's face as he kept a watchful eye upon him. The boy could not see his mouth on account of the heavy black moustache he wore.

"Confound you, don't you hear me, you rotten Canuck?" cried George again. "I want these dispatches, and have no time to waste."

"And you are a traitor to the country that gave you birth, and you would sell the rebels whom you are both working for and plundering at the same time——"

"Quick with these dispatches," broke in the traitor menacingly. "If I've got to fire——"

"And you'd fire in any case," cried Jack,

who knew that it was exceedingly unlikely a man of George's stamp would let him live after he had given up the dispatches he carried.

Jack's project and intention to hurl himself upon the renegade, and take chances, was at that very moment happily averted. He had instinctively realised that only by instant action could the loss of his dispatches, and his own death, be averted. If he was shot in the discharge of his duty, it would only be anticipating the action of the traitorous mercenary.

But salvation had come to Jack in the shape of his dog Piper. That sagacious animal—undoubtedly man's wisest and most affectionate friend amongst the so-called brutes—divined the situation in all its crudity and tragedy and came to his aid. Before George could detect its purpose or fire, Piper had sneaked up and flown at the hireling's throat. Jack rushed in upon and seized the barrel of his gun at the same moment. He wrenched it from his hands, and smashed the stock by hitting the butt against the ground. Then he turned to the hireling, who was battling wildly with the dog, trying to force him back from his throat with his bare hands, and endeavouring to shout for aid at the same time.

But before Jack could do anything two Breeds came running up. They seemed to understand the situation at a glance, and were about to level their guns at Jack when both of them were struck down from behind by two men who had run up swiftly and silently. The latter were Sergeant Pollock and Terence O'Donohue.

"Hello! whom have we here?" cried the Police Sergeant, as he turned his attention to the man and the dog as they struggled together.

"That fellow George," replied Jack; "but Piper will have him killed in another minute."

"It's too great an honour for him," cried the Sergeant. "Call off Piper, Jack. We'll take him along with us."

Police methods were deeply ingrained in the non-commissioned officer.

It was with no little difficulty that the boy managed to release the traitor from the grip of the dog, but he did so. Piper seemed disappointed.

"Come on, my man," cried the Sergeant. "Catch hold of him on the other side, Jack, and touch him up behind if he lags. Now then!"

They ran the badly surprised George along

in front of them. Several moments later the barracks loomed up dimly in the foreground.

"Terence," said the Sergeant, "I'm sorry you haven't got that bugle here you started out with. I'd forgotten all about it till this minute. It would have given those in the fort a clue as to who we were."

Almost before the words had left his lips, O'Donohue had thrust one hand into the ragged breast of his coat and produced the article in question.

"And did ye think I'd forgotten it, Sergeant dhear?" he inquired. "No fear! Though I haven't been able to practise on it of late, still it wasn't likely I'd be forgittin' it. No fear!"

And straightway he put the bugle to his lips and blew a blast on it that would have made the blood of any professional instrumentalist run cold. And then he blew a second blast.

"That'll do, Terence—that'll do, thank you!" cried the Sergeant hurriedly. "They ought to hear that. Another hundred yards or so and we're there."

The barracks had been farther from the rebel lines than they imagined, but at last they reached them. The curious feature of the situation was that they saw no one about

—not even a sentry. Having to keep their prisoner on the move had prevented them looking about as they would otherwise have done.

"It's very queer," observed Sergeant Pollock, as with some considerable difficulty they managed to scale the rough stockade that stretched between a couple of barrack buildings. "We haven't even been challenged, and there doesn't seem to be any one here!"

"Dhivil a wan is here!" echoed Terence O'Donohue, with something that almost savoured of dismay. "They must have abandoned the fort and sneaked across the river on the ice, knowing that when it broke up it would cut them off from the inimy!"

It was a terrible and ironic situation truly.

"And you coves thought you were doing a mighty clever trick!" sneered their prisoner, who had now recovered his wind. "You are trapped and in a hole, if ever men were. And curse you and your dog at the same time! The laugh's on my side now. You're trapped, I tell you!"

Despite the look of mingled rage and terror on the renegade George's face, and the fact that Piper had done considerable damage to his physiognomy, this was too much for

Terence. He caught him by the breast and shook him.

"If ye say another word, ye scoundrel, I'll do the hangman out of his fee and settle accounts wid ye now," he cried.

"That'll do, Terence," said Sergeant Pollock. "The fellow is a bit raised, and isn't quite responsible for what he says. You'd better be careful, George. Remember that anything you say—— I wouldn't help to put the rope round my own neck if I were you."

"Here is some one—several Mounted Policemen, in fact!" cried Jack. "I see how it is now—this is only an outlying bit of the barracks that they've abandoned, and we're not in the fort proper yet."

And what Jack said was indeed the case.

"Hello there! who are you, and what do you want?" cried some one. "Stand, or we fire!"

"A friend, but I don't know the countersign," replied Sergeant Pollock. "If that's you, Sergeant Dan Tucker, I'd be obliged if you'd take this prisoner off our hands. Special Constable Irwin and I have dispatches for the O.C."

CHAPTER XIV

A BRAVE LITTLE GARRISON—FORT PITT

When Jack saw the little garrison of Fort Pitt, which consisted of only a troop or so of Mounted Police under Inspector Francis Dickens—a son of the great novelist—he was amazed to think how such a small force could have kept at bay a body of the enemy which outnumbered them by ten to one. But one man entrenched is always equal to six or seven attacking. There were, of course, a few settlers and others who had taken part in the defence, otherwise it might not have been possible to hold out against such tremendous odds.

Sergeant Pollock and Jack were at once taken before the officer in charge. He, like all the others, had taken an active share in the heroic defence, as the uniform he wore bore eloquent testimony. Sergeant Pollock and Jack handed him the dispatches.

"You've done splendidly, both of you," he

said, when he had heard a brief and modest account of their trip from the Sergeant. "I've a fairly good idea of the difficulties you must have encountered, Sergeant Pollock, though you haven't said much on that score. But we'll talk about that again." And then he said some kind things to Jack.

He read the dispatches, smiled, and nodded his head. He laid the papers down on the table in front of him, and remarked—

"I may say these dispatches only anticipate what I intended doing. But of course they give me the authority and strengthen my hands. I am very glad indeed to have them. There must have been some desperate fighting at many of the posts all over the country; but that was inevitable—just as surely as the relief of certain garrisons and the punishment of the rebels is certain. But we can't stick it out any longer—we must act to-morrow or next day at the very latest, for a very good reason."

"Short of provisions, sir?" asked the Sergeant.

"Practically starving," was the calm reply. "You see, there are some women and children here, and they must be fed."

"Of course, sir."

"It would be no good to us even if we did manage to fight our way through the rebels at this time of the year. Napoleon's retreat from Moscow wouldn't be in it with such an attempt." The Inspector's pinched and care-worn features relaxed. "Seriously, I wouldn't be justified in trying it."

"The river is breaking up, sir," said Sergeant Pollock, "and there will be the scow—the ferry."

"Yes, that's our only hope, and that's how you managed to get up to the fort as you did without being seen—though, of course, you wouldn't have got within the part that mattered most without being stopped. We were all down at the river, with the exception of a few sentries, trying to move the scow free of the ice when you came up. We've managed it, but it was an awful job."

Jack had wondered why the Mounted Policemen moving about had looked more like navvies than troopers, seeing they carried picks and axes, ropes and levers, in place of rifles.

"I presume you'll try and guide the scow down to Battleford, sir—about a hundred miles? But will there be room for all?"

"It will be a terrible risky business with all that floating ice about. But when once

the big bust up is over we'll have a chance. There is just room enough for all of us, I think."

"It is just possible that Battleford may have relieved itself by the time we reach it, sir. Only, in case it hasn't, it might be as well to run the scow ashore a few miles this side of it."

"Yes, that would be a wise precaution, and if even Battleford hasn't been relieved, I don't think it would be difficult to get through to the fort. The rebels might think we were one of the relief forces from down East."

"And about the prisoner George we handed over, sir?" asked Sergeant Pollock.

"Ah, we'd better interview him now. Bring the prisoner George here, Sergeant Tucker."

Within three minutes the prisoner was marched into the orderly-room between two troopers. He did not seem particularly dismayed. There was rather a look of conscious rectitude and virtuous indignation on his face. He was a specious villain, truly.

"What have you got to say for yourself, George?" asked the Inspector. "You are charged with being a rebel, and as such are liable to the death penalty."

But George only smiled in a sardonic sort

of fashion. He was no more a rebel than the Inspector was, he said. He was trying to get through to the fort when he was set upon by the Police Sergeant and the boy he saw before him. Why, goodness only knew! If either of them said differently they lied. What had he to gain by being a rebel? And as for the man and the boy who testified against him, he supposed it was promotion and some sort of reward that led them to bear false witness as they did!

"All right," said the Inspector. "If that's the stand you take up we shan't waste any more time over you now. We'll deal with you later, and I think we can pretty well prove up to the hilt that you advocated the confiscation of all landed property from its rightful owners; not only that, but you have openly incited to rebellion and borne arms yourself against the Queen's uniform." Turning to his guard: "Take the fellow away, men."

And the Old Countryman who advocated the confiscation of all property from its rightful owners, and did not hesitate to sell his own countrymen, was marched off.

Then the Inspector turned to the Sergeant and Jack, and said—

"As I dare say you haven't had a decent sleep for some nights, I'd advise you to turn in between the sheets as soon as possible. Sergeant Tucker, see that Sergeant Pollock and Special Constable Irwin get the best there is in barracks, though I dare say that isn't saying much. Still I know that there is a good drink of hot coffee somewhere. You have both done splendid service, and done it remarkably well, but you'll hear of that in another form and later on. I congratulate you both, and thank you at the same time."

Sergeant Pollock saluted, and they both left the room. They went straight to a large barrack-room where there was a good fire, and both had what they wanted most, a good wash with warm water and a complete change of clothing. Then they were taken to the mess-room, where they partook of at least a good drink of hot coffee, if the bread and bacon were of meagre proportions. But they were not particularly hungry. The rations they had taken with them had been sufficient for the journey.

Half an hour later they had turned into clean and dry blankets, and were enjoying the first comfortable sleep that had been

permitted them since they started out upon their adventurous trip. It did not signify that they were now in a beleaguered Police Post that might be rushed by Breeds or Indians at any moment; or that when they did leave it they would be committed to an adventure that would probably prove quite as fraught with deadly peril as any they had already passed through. To run the blockade down the Saskatchewan on a scow, in momentary danger of being crushed between the bergs of floating ice, or shot by the fanatical and irresponsible rebels from the banks, did not prevent them from enjoying a sound and refreshing night's rest. The consciousness that they had safely executed the duties with which they had been entrusted in the face of immense odds outweighed all other considerations.

CHAPTER XV

THE RETREAT DOWN STREAM

It must have been nine o'clock next day before Jack awoke, and when he did, it was a minute or so before he could realise where he was. It was such a novel thing to find oneself in bed—even although it was only a board-and-trestle one with a palliasse stuffed with hay. He was in a long, somewhat bare-looking room with several other beds exactly like his own ranged round the wall, and with a great stove in the centre of the room. But the sun shone brightly in through the large windows, and two or three troopers were busily engaged packing their kits or rolling up their blankets. Sergeant Pollock was nowhere to be seen.

The first thing that impressed itself most upon Jack was the thundering and roaring that seemed in the air. When a trooper nodded to him and said something, he could

hardly make out what he said. His lips only seemed to move. Then the trooper jerked his thumb in the direction of the window, and Jack understood. The ice on the river had broken up, and was coming down stream.

When Jack had completed his toilet and went outside, he saw a sight that he would not be likely to forget the longest day he lived. The great, wide Saskatchewan River with the bright sunlight streaming upon it was a vision of wonderful beauty and majesty. As far as the eye could reach, great bergs of ice of every conceivable shape and size, and blue and green and dazzling white, were churning and crowding one another as they hurried on to their destination in Lake Winnipeg, and probably Hudson Bay farther on, a thousand miles away and more. It was odd to see how these giant masses of ice, piled one on top of the other, crashed into other masses and demolished them. And ever the sun was gilding them, and they were catching and sending back his rays like so many magic mirrors. A million points that gleamed and flashed like diamonds made it almost difficult to look upon the ever-changing and weirdly beautiful scene.

And everywhere there was the soft, mild breath of the warm Chinook wind. Snow-

birds were flitting about rejoicing in the fact that Spring had come again, and Summer would follow Spring. That is one thing about the North-West territories of Canada—when Spring comes, it comes with a rush. There is no dallying or half-heartedness. All at once one has the brilliant sunshine and the warmth, the singing of birds, the bud upon the bough, the springing up of the grass, and a hundred different kinds of prairie flowers almost under one's feet—a grand rejuvenation and rejoicing of all created things in God's own garden, the prairie.

"It is all glorious and wonderful," said Jack to himself as he looked at the scene before him. "And I know what they'll be doing at home, in the Pembina Valley, to-day. Father will be getting the banking away from the walls, and putting the waggons upon wheels again. And mother — well, it won't be long before I'm back again, and it's no use thinking about that now—no use getting home-sick just yet."

He was cut short in his soliloquy by the voice of Sergeant Pollock behind him.

"Ho, Jack!" he said cheerily. "It's the sort of morning to warm the cockles of one's heart, isn't it? But come and have a look at

the scow. We're going to tackle the river to-night, they tell me."

"What!" said Jack, "go in that big square Noah's Ark without the lid sort of thing on a Niagara of icebergs like that!" The prospect indeed seemed appalling.

"No, we couldn't exactly tackle it as it is just now, Jack, but by midnight or to-morrow morning the worst of the ice will have passed. You see, it's worst when it is just breaking up—you can't hear yourself speak then, you know—but it doesn't take long to get down the river with a mighty volume of water behind one. Of course it won't all have passed, but we've got to take chances on that."

"And what about the Breeds? Won't they try and prevent us?"

"They think that the old scow is so badly damaged that it will be impossible to float it. That's what we've taken care to let them know, you see. And anyhow, they'd hardly expect us to start just yet! They don't know that we are so short of food."

"I expect, then, we can look forward to a lively time to-night?"

"I should think so. The men are getting ready to make a start. When the time comes to go aboard you'll find everything ready, and

you can be fairly certain there will be no delay. Oh yes, Jack, I don't think you'll find it a dull trip to Battleford on that old scow. It will take all hands to get it launched, but it's on a slope, so I think there will be no great trouble. But let's go and have a look at the enemy."

They went to one of the highest points in the fort, and had a look around. It seemed odd that there was not a single human being in sight. Only at a distance of about a mile or so there were numerous earth-works thrown up. Smoke as from camp-fires could be seen rising in many directions. Indeed, it was obvious that the enemy described a great half-circle round them. They evidently looked upon the river as an effectual barrier to the north should the garrison be foolhardy enough to meditate escape in that direction.

"There's lots of them there, Jack, though, of course, you don't see them. They are not such fools as to let us draw a bead on them. See that low, flooded field over there?—that's the way we came in last night. If it hadn't been low and flooded they wouldn't have allowed us to get in quite so easily. And if we had seen their camps as easily as we can see them now, we wouldn't have passed through

their lines quite so unconcernedly," said Sergeant Pollock, smiling.

"Oh, I wouldn't like to say I was exactly unconcerned," Jack hastened to observe. "To tell the truth, I was in no end of a funk, only I suppose the excitement of it all kept me up to the mark."

"Well, there's no credit in being brave if one doesn't fully realise the danger one is running," said the Sergeant. "One is rash simply because one doesn't use one's brains, or more than likely because one hasn't got any."

"That was a splendid idea of yours, Sergeant, turning loose those dogs," said Jack after a pause. "They tell me they kept on barking all night, but, of course, I wasn't awake to hear them. Perhaps the *Metis* will be rather sleepy to-night."

"I hope so," said the Sergeant.

Despite the thought of the immense risks they were going to take that night, and the fact that they were now on short rations, and, indeed, had not sufficient to appease their healthy appetites, Jack quite enjoyed that bright, sunny day with the Mounted Police in the besieged fort. They were such a splendid lot of fellows, those North-West Mounted Policemen—many of them, indeed, men of considerable attainments

and of good family, who preferred a life of freedom and adventure to the narrower and more prosaic so-called civilised life of towns. To have seen them going about their various duties laughing and chaffing one another, one would have imagined there was no such thing as an encompassing enemy within a hundred miles. Of course there were sentries and outposts, but one could see little of them. They were not there to be marks for an army of hunters.

As for Terence O'Donohue, he had made himself at home at once in the barracks, and was already popular. Some of the troopers he had known before.

By evening it was noticeable that the amount of ice coming down the river was much less. Jack thought that by midnight it might be quite possible to launch the scow without mishap. But it was launched long before then, owing to the river falling and disclosing a rough groyne of stones just above the scow. This kept back the ice, and made it possible to load up without any particular difficulty. It was no easy job getting the huge scow properly afloat, but what with all hands working at it, this was at last successfully accomplished.

It was now midnight, and the enemy had

made no demonstration. Such articles as arms and ammunition, and whatever was considered most valuable, were placed in the boat. Then a few horses were taken aboard. Sergeant Paterson and Corporal Wylde, with four Mounted Policemen, a Half-Breed, and two Indian scouts, had volunteered to drive the others before them right through the lines of the *Metis* at the place where Sergeant Pollock and Jack had entered, at the same time as the scow dropped down stream. They would then make a dash through to Battleford. It would not do to allow their horses to fall into the hands of the enemy. They would probably want them badly later on themselves. It was not unlikely that those in the scow, if they had luck, and the other Police party with the horses, would arrive at a certain point above Battleford much about the same time. A place was made at one end of the scow for the women and children, and various articles were piled up around them, so as to protect them from any fire which the enemy might direct upon them in the event of their being discovered.

Midnight, and the time had come for the sailing of the scow. All got aboard. By means of long poles it was pushed out into the

swollen stream. By this time the great bergs had mostly disappeared, and there was not the crowding of the hummocks of ice that would have made their journey impossible a few hours earlier. Still, there was a great deal of heavy, grinding ice which in that current might prove extremely dangerous. There were even times when bergs of ice towered over and threatened the scow with destruction. And it would have been a thousand chances to one against ever reaching the shore again if anything had happened. There was also another danger, that of two large masses of ice borne along by opposing currents being driven together and "nipping" the scow. This also would mean annihilation.

"All aboard!" The order was given and the crowded scow dropped down stream. At the same moment, at a signal from the Inspector, one of the Mounted Policemen ran back to the party that was standing saddled up and ready to run off the horses, to join and start them off also. Sergeant Pollock was busy with one of the long sweeps or oars, and Jack, with Piper and several Mounted Policemen with loaded rifles, stood in the rear end of the great scow to be ready in case of attack.

"Keep her out into the middle of the stream," cried the Inspector; "she'll likely drift there gradually and naturally, but, anyhow, let's make sure."

They all recognised the importance of the scow getting away from the shore as soon as possible. There was, fortunately, not quite so much moon as on the previous night, and that would be in their favour. The men worked at the sweeps, and endeavoured to get the scow into midstream as quickly as possible. Would the sentries of the enemy discover them before they could get out of sight and, therefore, danger? The noise of the grinding ice was comparatively slight now compared to what it had been only a few hours before, and they ought to be able to distinguish sounds from the shore—such as the alarm and the shots fired when the Mounted Police, with their horses, rushed through the lines of the *Metis*. The current was strong, and bore them steadily along. Perhaps it was as well that they should get as far down stream as possible before any alarm was given to the enemy. It was a wonder that the *Metis*' sentries had not detected them before now. They could only account for this fact by the possibility that the bergs of ice had hidden

them from sight, and the enemy had not anticipated their risking that still dangerous mode of travel. Perhaps the *Metis* had thought it was unlikely the Mounted Police would try and vacate the fort at all. Had they been aware that their food supply was practically exhausted, they would, doubtless, have kept a better look-out.

"I can't make it out, but we should have heard something of Sergeant Paterson's party before now," said the Inspector, who stood near Jack.

The words were hardly out of his mouth before a wild and confused babel of sounds came from the shore. There were wild cheers, shouts of alarm, and whoops—Indian war-whoops indeed—and several shots rang out.

"They've caught the *Metis* napping," cried Inspector Dickens. "I only hope they've managed to stampede some of the enemy's horses. They noted where they were camped in the daytime, and I rather fancy they've managed to do the trick."

And, as afterwards transpired, they had. To describe how it was done one must revert to Sergeant Paterson and his men.

CHAPTER XVI

MORE SURPRISES

When Sergeant Paterson, with Corporal Wylde and five others, mounted and leading three horses apiece, received the message from the scow that they had started on their perilous voyage down stream, they did not start right away. They thought it as well to wait until they saw whether or not the scow was noticed by the enemy before they charged through their lines. This would be more likely to give the boat a good start. There was a big bend in the river with high cut-banks some few miles farther down, and if, when they had passed through the *Metis*, the latter should suspect something and detect the scow, then the peninsula mentioned would make a good point of vantage from which they could fire upon the fugitives.

The Police waited in the shadow of the barrack buildings some little time, but at

last a dog from the enemy's lines detected their presence and made a terrible ado.

"We'll have to go now," said Sergeant Paterson. "It's no use waiting until the Breeds suspect something is on and get ready for us. We must charge their horse-camp right away. Keep to the right with your men, Corporal Wylde. Now then, off, and drive everything in front of you! See to your rifles, and make good use of them."

The seven bold riders spread out and made for the enemy's horse-lines. Their horse-flesh was fresh—too fresh perhaps—but the sodden earth made quick going somewhat dangerous. The hollow drumming of hoofs in the clay must have sounded ominously to the enemy. Quickly the Police bore down upon the horse-lines. As yet they had uttered no sound. Time enough for that when the horse-guards realised the nature of the bold attack and fired upon them. Then a Half-Breed sentry, when it was too late, saw Sergeant Paterson coming in the lead and raised his rifle. But the Policeman was too quick for him, and with his Adams revolver shot his assailant through the head. Next moment wild cries, still wilder curses and shots, rang out everywhere. The *Metis* were completely taken by surprise.

Those seven Mounted Policemen, with thirty fresh and vigorous horses charging down upon their badly-watched lines, must have appeared to them like a regiment of cavalry.

"Hurrah, boys! Shout for all you are worth, and put the fear of God into their hearts!" cried Corporal Wylde, who was a stalwart ex-Guardsman. "Here are their horse-lines. Sweep everything in front of you."

They thundered down upon that camp of horses and simply bore them off before them. Such animals as were picketed broke their picket ropes or pulled the pins from the ground. Such as were tied up to posts by shaganappi, green-hide, or rope instantly broke away and, panic-stricken, galloped off ahead of the Police. Several Breeds, some on foot, some mounted, tried to bar their way, but they were either shot or unhorsed, while their steeds joined the affrighted herd and galloped off just as madly with them.

The men noticed there was one gaunt-looking broncho in the lead which appeared to take a fiendish delight in the proceedings. It threw its head into the air and snorted wildly, while its heels described vicious half-circles when any other horse or rider had

the temerity to come anywhere near it. From what Terence O'Donohue had told him about the valuable steed he had been obliged to leave outside the post, Corporal Wylde rather suspected that this might be the animal in question. In any case it constituted itself the leader of the stampede. It was a wild and furious charge while it lasted—a scene of excitement, terror, and indescribable confusion—but its object was achieved. The enemy, if it did pursue them with what horse-flesh it had left, was sorely crippled.

"Let's take them along with us, boys—just fetch them along," cried Sergeant Paterson, as the two parties united and headed the excited mob in an easterly direction.

But, of course, the horses that had been stampeded were not all the mounts the enemy possessed. There were many Breeds who kept their horse-flesh picketed in outlying sheds, and behind their Red-river carts and skin-tents, and these were speedily requisitioned with a view of pursuing and punishing the bold raiders. But by the time they were ready a discovery had been made. Some of the Breed sentries had seen the scow in the river down near the peninsula. If only they could catch up on it before it passed that point,

they would be able to inflict severe punishment upon the Police, if, indeed, they did not manage to annihilate them altogether. A shout was raised, "To the scow—to the scow on the river—the enemy is escaping that way!"

The *Metis* realised it was useless trying to catch up with those bold horsemen who had broken through their lines in such an unexpected and desperate fashion and made off with their horses. But, cutting across the peninsula, they would just be in time to intercept the scow. Many of them rushed off to do so, some mounted and some on foot.

But now it is necessary to return to the sorely tried and anxious boat-load of humanity drifting down stream in the raw, chill air and misty moonlight.

When they heard the shooting and the distant whoops and yells, they knew that the Police were carrying out their bold programme and forcing the lines of the *Metis*. Gradually the noise died away, and once again all they could hear was the crashing of the ice and the shriller clatter as some berg of greater proportions than its fellows cannoned into an unwieldy flat piece and toppled over, shivering as with the sound of broken glass on the smooth surface.

The refugees had been made as comfortable as possible, and sat huddled together at one end of the scow, with saddlery and other gear piled round the sides so as to protect them in the event of the enemy opening fire. The bulk of them were wonderfully cheerful, despite the discomfort of their position, and the thought that their homes had been looted and destroyed by the cruel and misguided rebels. Some, however, had lost near and dear ones in the murderous onslaught made upon them by the Breeds and Indians, and they, naturally, sat silent and apathetic. The world had now, perhaps, but little attraction for them —all that they had held most dear was gone for ever—hurried out of life by the bloody fanaticism of men like Riel, and the vindictive and mercenary counsels of political adventurers like George.

The Police themselves were alert and cheerful. They could not do enough for the women and children in the boat. Most of them had taken off their buffalo overcoats and wrapped them round the shoulders of the women and children or such of the settlers as they thought required them. The latter did not know that these brave Police had practically starved themselves for days in order that they might

be fed. But it never has been the habit of the Royal North-West Mounted Police to breathe a word about such things. They have at all times gone about their hard and frequently difficult and dangerous duties with a strict sense of justice, and with an entire subordination of self. Theirs may have been that reserve natural to brave and strong men, but that is better so. They have laid down their lives in the faithful discharge of their duties times without number—without hope or prospect of reward—unless, indeed, it took the shape of a kindly memory in the hearts of those they served so well. But not in Canada only have her sons—those Riders of the Plains—served her. Let the lonely graves on the South African veldt speak.

But Canada cannot forget.

"We must keep as near the opposite bank as possible," said the officer in charge. "It may just be that the enemy have sighted the scow, and they are not particular whom they fire on."

"I can see them now, sir," cried Jack, who, with Piper at his feet, was helping three Policemen with one of the long sweeps. "I can see them running across the neck of the bend. Most of them are mounted."

Jack had exceptionally keen eyesight, and it had not deceived him. The Breeds, smarting under their late punishment, had rallied, and were determined to revenge themselves on this boat-load on the river.

"Keep well over, men, and have your rifles handy," cried the Inspector again. "Keep well down when I give the word, and try and shoot at something."

They pulled hard at the sweeps, and gradually worked the scow towards the opposite shore. But it was difficult work steering through the bergs, and the current ran swiftly.

Silently and quickly they dropped down the river, doing their utmost to keep the scow as far from that high cut-bank as possible. The nearer the far shore they kept, the easier it would be to see over the opposite cut-bank. They rounded the bend, and swiftly negotiated the fresh reach of river. It was at the base of the peninsula where danger was to be apprehended, for by the time they got there it was fairly certain the *Metis* would have been able to collect.

"Keep down, all," cried the officer. "You can't do more with the sweeps now. Take your rifles, and sight them for three hundred yards. Steady!"

He had not given the word of command a moment too soon. A desultory fire from the opposite shore was opened upon them. At the very first shot a trooper, who had been moving a settler's wife into a place of safety, dropped with a bullet through his arm.

"See to him, Corporal Tulloch," cried the officer, "and you, Constable O'Brien, help him. The rest of you fire whenever you can see anything to aim at."

But it was not easy to see anything to fire at. True to their hunting instincts, it was not likely the *Metis* were going to expose themselves. And now, as they approached the narrow passage at the base of the peninsula, they saw that a terrible ordeal lay ahead. The enemy could fire on them without danger to themselves. The bullets fairly buzzed and sputtered all around them. Fortunately for them, there were some large bergs piled up between them and the enemy, and the scow, owing to its heavy load, was low in the water. In point of fact, it could only have been seen dimly from the cut-bank, albeit the bergs in the moonlight gave out a certain amount of light. It was odd to hear the bullets ricochet off the ice. Sometimes they struck and glanced off the water, sending it up in a bow-shaped jet. Others

merely sang over their heads, and plopped into the opposite bank, and sometimes they would strike a mass of solid ice at an acute angle, and go spinning off into space, buzzing or droning in an odd and disconcerting fashion.

Those in the scow kept firing as best they could at the somewhat vague edge of that cut-bank. It was not easy to see in the half light. Jack, between his intervals of firing, had some difficulty in keeping Piper quiet. That intelligent canine would have liked to get at the enemy. It would have made things lively for them. Then one of the horses was shot in the head, and dropped on its knees. The rebels were making better shooting. A minute or two later another horse was shot.

"Keep under cover as best you can," cried the officer. "We're getting to the narrow part of the river. Once past it and we bear away from the enemy."

But they were fast approaching the base of the peninsula, where they would be practically at the mercy of the *Metis*. It would not take more than a few minutes to pass it, but those few minutes might be fraught with death to them. The troopers fired intermittently, so as to keep down the enemy's fire as much as possible. They were in dangerous plight. And

then the unexpected happened, as it so frequently does, not only in sensational fiction, but in real life—for, after all, most fiction is but a weak reflex or imitation of the stranger happenings that actually do take place.

In order to explain how in the present instance succour came when least expected, it is necessary to hark back to Sergeant Paterson and Corporal Wylde as, driving the Breeds' horses ahead of them, they rode in a south-easterly direction so as to strike the comparatively high and dry cut-banks of the Saskatchewan again. It is, contrary to the expectations of the uninitiated, usually higher, drier, and consequently firmer underfoot on or near the banks of a great river than anywhere else. They had somewhat slackened their pace, seeing that the *Metis* did not seem particularly bent on following them up, when suddenly it suggested itself to the two non-commissioned officers that there might possibly be another elucidation to the mystery. Corporal Wylde sang out to Sergeant Paterson that he believed the Breeds were making for the east side of the neck of land at the peninsula so as to intercept the scow. Some one had evidently told them it was floating down the river.

"I was just thinking much the same thing," replied the Sergeant. "Let's run these horses down a mile or two yet, then we can leave some one to keep them on the move, and go back and prevent those fellows harassing the scow. It won't take much to do that, and of course they won't know who we are, seeing they certainly won't expect us back."

"That's a rattling good idea!" exclaimed Corporal Wylde. "It is always the unexpected trick that tells."

They ran the horses a mile or two beyond and wide of the base of the peninsula, and, leaving two men to keep them on the move, rode back to where they apprehended trouble. They, however, took the precaution of making a considerable circle, so as to catch the clever Breeds who were going to surprise the scow in the rear. This would be something those gentry could certainly not expect, and have some difficulty in understanding.

Their plans worked out well. When they came behind the Breeds, who were mostly grouped together some little distance back from the cut-bank, they caught sight of their horses standing about untied and unpicketed, as the horses of Western hunters are generally taught to do, and they determined to capture them

also. A Breed would be nowhere without his horse. It would prevent him acting on the aggressive. What with the horses they had already taken that night, it would mean a serious loss to the enemy.

Two troopers rode quietly over to the standing animals and slowly edged them off to the east. As their owners were mostly lying on their faces, slightly back from the edge of the cut-bank, they did not see what was going on. One man only happened to look behind him, and saw that their mounts were being driven off by two riders; but he merely thought that this was being done by his own comrades for fear of those in the scow doing them injury by their fire.

It must have been a really astounding and heart-breaking surprise to them when, just as the scow was getting near enough to enable them to do deadly damage, they should find themselves at the mercy of a skilled and merciless enemy in their rear. Bang, bang, bang! and it seemed to them that a regiment of soldiers was behind them. They were between two fires with a vengeance. Some of them giving way to panic rose to flee, and that same moment they were an easy mark for the men in the scow as well as for those

in their immediate neighbourhood. As the majority could not rise for fear of being shot, they were obliged to lie where they were, with the result that they could not see by what force they were being attacked in the rear. They were now much too occupied to trouble about the scow that in another minute or two would have weathered the bend and be out of sight. They only wondered how they were going to get out of the exceedingly awkward fix they were in.

It is quite possible the Police party would have almost wiped them out but for two things: a dark bank of clouds temporarily drifted over the moon, making it difficult to distinguish things clearly enough to shoot; and it was obvious that the Breeds were being reinforced by late arrivals on the scene.

"It won't do, boys, to wait much longer, or we'll be caught between two fires," cried Sergeant Paterson. "They are ten to one, remember, and when they discover we are only a handful they'll pluck up courage. The scow is out of danger now. Give those chaps in front and those coming on a volley, and then we'll be off. Now then!"

They gave the attackers of the scow, and those who were coming on to reinforce them,

several well-directed shots and made off. As before, they drove the fresh batch of horses ahead of them. The Breeds who had been coming up in the rear, puzzled and somewhat alarmed at the unexpected volley, drew up, and then advanced towards their comrades on the cut-bank. They had not even sighted the Police party in that treacherous light. The result was that their own kith and kin whom they had come to reinforce, mistaking them for the enemy who had been firing upon them, at once faced round and fired upon them with right goodwill. They had not thought an enemy would be foolish enough to advance so recklessly. The sorely-astonished reliefs, fairly staggered by such a warm and hostile reception from those they had come to help, could not account for such a mistake. A fierce resentment possessed them. Mistake or no mistake, it was not the sort of thing that could be forgiven or passed over. Next moment they were slaughtering one another with enthusiasm and impartiality. They knew quite well now it was their own kith and kin whom they were so busily engaged in murdering, but they had no time to think why they were doing so. It was a case of tit for tat. Some of their leaders endeavoured to stop the

senseless massacre, but their voices were not heard in the hubbub, and if they were, no one heeded them. To make matters worse, those in the now disappearing scow were also firing upon them.

"Thank goodness we're clear of that lot—at least in the meantime!" exclaimed Inspector Dickens to Sergeant Pollock, who happened to be standing near him.

"I think I can understand what has happened," said the Sergeant. "Sergeant Paterson and the others, after getting through the lines of the enemy, knew that they were sure to spot us and wait for us here, so returned and surprised them in our rear. Then they made off after their horses again, and another lot of Breeds came up to reinforce the first lot, and they have mutually mistaken each other for the enemy."

"And a jolly good business for us, too!" observed the Inspector. "Under the circumstances, we're not likely to be attacked again. Those Breeds must have punished one another pretty badly. If it hadn't been that we have the women and children to think of, I'd have delayed and made an attack upon them. I believe we could almost have whipped the lot of them, seeing we have crippled them so."

"It might have been another matter by daylight, sir," said Sergeant Pollock. "In fact, it could not have happened. They wouldn't have allowed us to take their horses to begin with, and they couldn't have made the mistakes they have done."

Gradually the sound of the firing ceased, but by this time they were miles down the river. It was very unlikely, when one came to think of the severe handling the enemy had received, that they would attempt pursuit. Their only means of doing so had been partly taken from them. In the meantime, so far as the Police party was concerned, fortune had been very kind to them. Had the breaking up of the ice not occurred when it did, they would have been obliged either to have attempted fighting their way through the enemy —and surely that would have been a forlorn hope, seeing the enemy was twenty to one— or they would have been forced to capitulate —and that the Police themselves could not have done, although they might have been obliged to come to an understanding with the *Metis* about the women and children.

"If Battleford is not yet relieved," said the Inspector, "it is just possible we may create a little distraction that will keep them going

until the relief column arrives. But I should think that it has already shown up. Anyhow, we'll soon see. In the meantime, we're making good progress. We should strike Elk Island by daylight. It might be as well to land there and give the women and youngsters a drink of tea, and what there is to eat. We'll have to wait ourselves until we manage to raise something later on in the day. But we'll soon do that."

And in the starlight and moonlight the boat-load of tired men and women and children drifted down the ice-filled river. There were those amongst them who suffered from wounds and troubles contracted by reason of their privations which might possibly prove fatal, and there were many there who were actually suffering at that very moment from lack of food; but there was never a murmur of regret nor a word of discontent. They were, with one solitary exception, all typical of those brave pioneers who have made for us that Greater Britain across the seas—our hope in the years to come.

CHAPTER XVII

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL

It was long after daylight had come when they drifted down stream on the north side of Elk Island, and managed to guide the scow into a species of back-water; but before they succeeded in doing so, they also made a very welcome addition to their now almost exhausted food supply. Terence O'Donohue managed to shoot a splendid black-tail deer, and a Mounted Policeman another. They had come upon and surprised them amid the undergrowth of the island. They had only fired just in time, for in another minute they would have taken to the water on the other side of the long strip, and thus have been lost to them. Within half an hour dozens of appetising and nourishing venison steaks were grilling on the sweet charcoal fires. They would not starve yet awhile. It was the first fresh meat some of them had tasted for weeks!

The island was quite a good sized one, and the refugees were very glad indeed to get out and stretch their cramped limbs. Moreover, the ice on the river was all the time becoming less formidable and dangerous, and this would be in their favour later on. As for Sergeant Paterson's party with the horses, it would not cover the miles so quickly and steadily as they could. Besides, owing to the melting snow soaking into the ground, the latter would all the time be becoming less easy to negotiate —even on the high river bank. They might as well delay a few hours here as farther on, where the camping might neither be so good nor yet so safe.

Jack managed to climb a high tree on the island, but he saw no signs of Sergeant Paterson's party, nor yet of any hostile Breeds. It was fairly certain the pursuit had been abandoned.

It was a really charming day, despite the damp and dripping condition of everything. The sun shone out brightly and warmly, and there was a soft Chinook wind blowing. White, fleecy clouds sped along in the blue sky, and everywhere birds and animals, from snowbirds and coyotes to white butterflies and gophers, were flitting and running about as

if with all-important business on hand. As a matter of fact, they had important business on hand.

They got on board again and once more dropped down stream. It was much pleasanter sailing now than it had been a few hours earlier. The bergs had decreased in size and numbers, and they were not so apprehensive of being caught and crushed in the flat ice. The current had slackened somewhat. They did not seem to be travelling more than five or six miles an hour. About five o'clock in the evening they reached another island, and here the officer determined to make fast for the night.

"It's no use going farther," he explained to the refugees. "We are comparatively safe where we are, and, anyhow, we'd have to wait somewhere for the party with the horses. Better here than in the perhaps dangerous neighbourhood of Battleford."

That night they had more steaks from the deer, and finished what little remained of the flour and tea and coffee. There was none for the Police; but the civilians did not know that. The water from the Saskatchewan was as good as any one could desire. Three men mounted guard, and the party made itself

as comfortable as it could under the circumstances.

At seven o'clock next morning they were all astir, for in a couple of hours or so they might be within several miles of Battleford, when it would be necessary to keep a sharp look-out. They would have to wait for Sergeant Paterson's party and ascertain whether or not Battleford was still besieged.

But there was no sign of Sergeant Paterson or his party that day. It was deemed as well not to proceed until he appeared. The one party could do little without the other. There could be no doubt that the melting snows had made the entire country almost impassable for traffic of any description. But the sun, which was now, according to its wont, rapidly gaining strength, would speedily remedy that defect within the course of the next few days.

It was not until the following day—the 23rd of April, to be correct—that Jack, from his look-out on the high cotton-wood tree, caught sight of Sergeant Paterson's party with the horses. With the field-glasses he had borrowed he could make them out beyond all shadow of doubt.

"But I thought at first it was a regiment,

sir," explained Jack to the officer. "They have four or five times the number of horses they started out with."

"They must have made a very thorough sweep of the Breed horse-lines," said the Inspector. "Well, that's comforting; the *Metis* will be handicapped without them, while they may come in handy for our people."

The order was given to push off the scow and make for the opposite shore. The high cut-banks had ceased now, and there was a gentle slope down to the water's edge. The ice by this time gave them very little trouble. Owing to the current, however, they were borne some considerable distance down stream before they could make the shore. While this was happening, Jack and Terence O'Donohue had been gazing intently at the great herd of horses which Sergeant Paterson's party drove in front of them. In the lead was a rakish, raw-boned animal that seemed to have taken all the others under its special protection. It set the pace for them. If it wanted to trot or gallop, off it went, and all the others, even the Policemen themselves, were obliged to follow. But if it took it into its head to view the scenery on either side, and stop to admire the same, there was evidently no one who dared to suggest

hurrying up. If any impatient or absent-minded animal strayed anywhere near its heels, it straightway received such a punishing that it was exceedingly unlikely it would ever do so again. This singular animal obviously dominated the entire group. Jack was beginning to think there was something familiar about it, when Terence O'Donohue exclaimed—

" Glory to goodness, and if it isn't Laurier his blessed silf ! An' didn't I know that horse was bound to distinguish himsilf ! "

When, however, the scow was brought into a comparatively safe haven, and Sergeant Paterson came down to meet them, he frankly admitted that if he and the others had not known that Laurier was the property of Terence O'Donohue, it certainly would not have survived the trip. While the horse had proved itself in some ways a useful leader of the herd—Laurier had practically led off the stampede when they had rushed the *Metis* lines—it had also, by reason of its truculence and eccentricities, kept the other horses in a perpetual state of turmoil and unrest. Laurier certainly possessed the useful faculty of finding out the only available dry ground over which to travel ; but upon the whole its disadvantages outweighed any good points.

A camp was formed in a dry spot close to a rising piece of ground, where it would be possible to keep a good look-out, and there was much interchange of recent experiences. But it was absolutely necessary that they should get into communication with the garrison at Battleford. There were doubtless sufficient provisions at the last-named place for all of them, while they would have to starve if they remained where they were. General Middleton would arrive with his troops as soon as it was possible to travel, and then all their troubles would be at an end. But the question was, Were the *Metis* still around Battleford, and if they did happen to be there, how were they going to get through to the comparative safety of the fort ?

It was Sergeant Pollock who proposed to the officer that he—the Sergeant—and Jack should go out and reconnoitre as soon as it grew dark. Pepin Quesnelle's house lay outside the village, and if they called there, it would be possible to find out from the dwarf or his mother how the land lay.

" All right, Sergeant Pollock ; you know the district and I don't, so if you'll go to-night, we'll keep a sharp look-out here until you come back," said the Inspector. " It is only

a few miles off anyhow. But about Special Constable Jack Irwin, are you quite sure you can speak for him? A man or boy who goes upon an expedition like this, remember, is always worth half a dozen pressed men, and probably more."

Sergeant Pollock smiled. "The trouble with Irwin, sir, is that he doesn't get as much as he wants to do. I'll answer for him. And, you see, he speaks the patois like a native."

"All right; if that is so, take the two best horses you can lay your hands on, and start as soon as you like."

Jack was delighted when his friend the Sergeant told him concerning their projected scouting expedition that night. "It was very good of you, Sergeant Pollock, to speak for me," he said, "and you can be sure I'll do my level best."

"That's all right, Jack," said the Sergeant. "You see, we've been mates on this expedition, and it is because I've found you—well, let's say reliable and level-headed—that I want you on this trip too. It really isn't altogether disinterestedness on my part."

But Jack felt that was only Sergeant Pollock's way of putting things. He—the Sergeant—

was a good specimen of a kindly, downright Canadian.

Terence O'Donohue was somewhat disappointed that he would not be able to accompany them, but, doubtless, to show that he bore Jack no ill-will because of the Sergeant's preference, he offered to lend him Laurier for the occasion. But Jack was unselfish, and assured Terence that a less valuable animal would suffice. There might be bullets flying, he said, and he would have it on his mind for ever afterwards if anything happened to Laurier. The little Irishman politely demurred, but Jack was not in two minds about the matter.

When it grew dark, he and Sergeant Pollock saddled up and rode off in an easterly direction. It could only be some several miles at most from Battleford. The going was not particularly bad, so they made fair time. It was a mild and somewhat misty night, but that did not matter to Sergeant Pollock, who, like most of the Mounted Police, could travel as well, if not better, with only the stars to guide him as by a well-marked trail. A couple of hours later they came to a lonely cottage that stood some little distance off the main trail, and close to a clump of cotton-wood trees, on the out-

skirts of Battleford. It had been necessary to proceed very warily, for if Breed sentries happened to be on the look-out, they would have run considerable danger of being shot. But as Jack had ascertained, Pepin Quesnelle's house was just outside the *Metis*' lines. They approached very carefully, and Sergeant Pollock was just about to dismount, when they were hailed by a loud voice that seemed to come from nowhere in particular, because it gave the curious effect of appearing to be everywhere at once.

"Aha, Shermoganish,[1] villains!" said the unseen person, "what brings you here? *Mais*, I know. It is Sergeant Pollock and the boy. But tie up your horses where they will not be able to smell Antoine. If they do, then it is adieu to your horses!"

"Pepin Quesnelle, by all that's lucky!" exclaimed Sergeant Pollock. "Well, I'm right glad to see you, Pepin. This is Jack Irwin, whom you've met before. We've come to ask your help and advice again."

"Well, that is all right, *mon ami*," said the dwarf, who now appeared from the shadow. "Whom better could you come to than Pepin Quesnelle? *Mais* you know that. But first

[1] Police.

you will put your horses in the stable. The mother she will be glad to see you. Come on!"

Pepin guided them to an outhouse, where they tied up their horses. Then the dwarf took them over to the log-house and entered. A bright fire on the hearth greeted them. Jack thought he had never seen a cleaner and more comfortable living-room than that which he now looked upon. It was quite a large room, and every piece of metal and culinary article in it fairly shone like either burnished silver or gold. There was an open fireplace, and even the hearthstone was cleanly swept and looked as if it had been sanded. But standing in the middle of the room, with a smile upon her face, was one of the most amiable-looking and spick-and-span old ladies that Jack had ever seen in his life. Her grey hair was neatly arranged, her dress and linen were spotless. She made Jack think of some fairy godmother in humble life. She regarded her visitors smilingly, and then looked at her son. And here again, despite what Sergeant Pollock had told him, Jack was not a little surprised. After all, it was perhaps not strange that Jack should be surprised, for he was only a boy, and, naturally, no matter how well-meaning or clever a boy may be, he could not be expected

to have that understanding regarding the far-reaching and, in the end, wise ways of Providence that, as a rule, only comes with the years. Jack saw in a moment that this old lady was supremely proud of her son Pepin, the dwarf. She even expected to find that same admiration for her only child in others. In her eyes, the man—Pepin—made her lose sight completely of any physical shortcomings. And, after all, the standard by which she judged was undoubtedly the right one.

"Mother," said Pepin, "you know Sergeant Pollock—that sad dog of a Sergeant I did tell you about who once fell through the rotten trap-door of the cellar in the house of St. Arnaud when they did dance there—*ma foi*, and they did dance!—at Christmas time one year, and I did play the fiddle. And this is the boy, mother, I did also tell you of—the boy who is friend of the little Irishman with the red head, and the horse that is also red, and which will one day make its master see red."

"Ah, I know Sergeant Pollock," said the old lady, as she proceeded to shake hands with her two visitors. "Yes, the friends of my son Pepin are, of course, my friends also, and I am very glad to see you both. You look as if you had travelled. You will have some tea?

Yes, of course you will have some tea. Pepin, I think you had better take Antoine 'way."

But the bear that had been lying like some huge dog facing the fire, and had risen to push its snout into Jack's hand, did not seem in a particularly truculent mood, so was allowed to remain. In point of fact, Jack was far from being at his ease with that great animal, which could have broken the back of a horse with one stroke of a giant paw, so very near to him. It doubtless was the law of association, but he could not help thinking of that terrible time he had a few years before, when such another bear as this chased him round and round the wood-pile until he was ready to drop. But Pepin and his mother saw to Antoine's indoor manners; he was only allowed into the living-room now and again by way of a treat, and as the bear knew very well that the slightest lapse from the rules of good behaviour would mean either the deft application of Pepin's long stick or his instant ejectment, he was decorum itself while the visitors remained, and even made a discreet show of appreciating them. Jack was glad he had not brought Piper along with him. He thought they might not exactly have hit it off together.

"And now, Pepin," said Sergeant Pollock, after he had given his hosts a brief outline of his recent experiences, "I may as well tell you why I'm here. Those who have come with us from Pitt are only a few miles away at the present moment, and I'd like to know if it is possible to get through to the fort? Are the *Metis*, and Big Bear and his lot, still hanging around? And Louis Riel—I suppose he is still here?"

"Only some of them are here," said Pepin. "There has been a big fight at Fish Creek, and General Middleton he would kill many of the *Metis* and the Indians. He is said to be at Clarke's Crossing now; but the roads they are bad, and I do not think the *Metis* know where he is. I think it would be easy for you to come on here in the dark and join those in the fort. Perhaps if you made brave show they would not try to prevent. They might think it was the soldiers who had come on. And I could tell those in the fort to be ready to help."

"Pepin, Jack Irwin and I can go right back now, and we can all be here long before morning. Tell me the best way to march on the fort."

Within ten minutes it was all arranged, and

while Jack and Sergeant Pollock rode back to bring on the others, Pepin went off on foot, accompanied by Antoine, to warn those at the fort with a view to concerted action.

But it is a matter of history now how the scheme was successfully carried out. Just before dawn, after a somewhat trying journey, the refugees, guided by Sergeant Pollock and Jack, marched straight on Battleford. The advance guard was challenged by the Breed sentries. But their opposition was futile. The Police made short work of those who rallied to oppose them. And when those in the fort joined forces with them, they attacked the lines of the *Metis* with such vigour that the latter were completely routed and fled in confusion. They had somehow got it into their heads that the Canadian army, which they had thought was still so far off, must have made a series of forced marches and contrived to get within striking distance. Perhaps Pepin Quesnelle could have explained how they came to think so.

But the principal struggle between the rebels and the Government was still to come. Indeed, it was only when the warm sun had dried the soaked prairie and made travelling possible that any decisive actions were fought.

Jack and Sergeant Pollock were both present at the Battle of Batoche when, on the eleventh day of May, the rebels tried conclusions with the Canadian troops under Middleton, and got badly beaten. But there were other even more exciting fights which Jack participated in, when, for instance, Colonel Otter attacked and defeated Poundmaker and his Indians after a seven hours' battle. But all these things are a matter of Canadian history, and it would take a book twice the size of this one to relate all the exciting adventures that Jack and his friends—including, of course, Piper and Laurier—took part in. Jack was also present when Louis Riel himself, a disillusioned and discredited fugitive, was taken prisoner near Batoche and the rebellion was virtually at an end. Still it was not until the twenty-eighth day of May that Poundmaker, with thirty of his chiefs, surrendered. Big Bear and his son were captured about a week later, and Jack was actually back at Fort Pitt with the troops when two hundred of Big Bear's Indians were forced to surrender.

It was a glorious home-coming for Jack when, in the autumn, he returned to his home in the Pembina Valley. His had been an exciting if trying experience for one so young, but he

looks back upon it now with the greatest satisfaction. Sergeant Pollock afterwards married, and became a rancher in the Cypress Hills country. Jack and he occasionally visit each other, and organise delightful hunting parties. Piper, by the way, always accompanies them on such occasions. Terence O'Donohue has a small farm on the outskirts of Cartwright, several miles south of the Pembina Valley, and every other Saturday or so he comes over to see Jack. He is generally accompanied by a certain rough-looking horse, which does not seem at all popular with the other quadrupeds on the farm. Why Terence brings this animal is always something of a mystery, seeing it would be as much as his master's life is worth to attempt to ride him, and as for going in harness, such a proposition would entirely depend on the particular mood that Laurier happened to be in. As Pepin Quesnelle once remarked, "Ah, that horse! that prodigal horse!"

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